اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا ۙ

Quran English Translation and Tafseer
Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah Al-Aaraf (The Heights)

سُوْرَةُ الْاَعْرَافِ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate**)**

الٓمّٓصٓ ۝١

(7:1) Alif-Lam-Mim-Sad.

كِتٰبٌ اُنْزِلَ اِلَيْكَ فَلَا يَكُنْ فِيْ صَدْرِكَ حَرَجٌ مِّنْهُ لِتُنْذِرَ بِهٖ وَذِكْرٰى لِلْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ ۝٢

(7:2) This is a Book revealed to you. (1) Let there be no impediment in your heart about it. (2) (It has been revealed to you) that you may thereby warn [the unbelievers], that it may be a reminder to the believers. (3)

(1) The word 'Book', in this context, signifies this very surah, al-A'raf.

(2) The Prophet (peace be on him) is directed to preach his Message without fear and hesitation, and to disregard his opponents' response. Such opponents may well be offended by his preaching of the Message, or may, hold it to ridicule, or go about maliciously twisting it, or acting with greater hostility. All this notwithstanding, the Message of Islam must be preached.

The Arabic word haraj (which we have translated as straitness), signifies an intractable bush. (See Ibn Manzur. Lisan al 'Arab and Firuzabadi, al-qamus, q.v. 'Harajah'.) 'Straitness or constriction in the breast' refers to the reluctance of a person to go ahead in the face of opposition. The following Qur'anic verse would seem to allude to this mental state of the Prophet (peace he on him): 'We do indeed know how your heart feels distressed at what they say' (Al-Hijr 15: 97). What painfully concerned the Prophet (peace be on him) was to find out how he could direct a people, whose adamance and opposition to truth had reached such high proportions, to the Right Way. The same state of mind

is again reflected in the Qur'anic verse: 'Perhaps you might feel inclined to part with a portion of what has been revealed to you, and your heart feels straitened lest they, say: "Why is a treasure not sent down unto him; or why does an angel not come with him?" ' (Hud 11:12).

(3) The main purpose of this surah is to jolt the people out of their heedlessness and to warn them of the dire consequences that will follow if they reject the call of the Prophet (peace be on him). Additionally , this surah also seeks to serve as a reminder to the believers - a purpose which is achieved, incidentally, by the warning made to the unbelievers.

اِتَّبِعُوۡا مَاۤ اُ نۡزِلَ اِلَـ ۡكُ مۡ مِّ ۡيۡ رَّبِّكُمۡ وَ لَا تَتَّبِعُ ۡن اهِ ۡمۡ اُ ۡنۡ وۡنِ اَ ۡلِيَآءَ ؕ قَلِ ۡيۡ لًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُ ۡنَ ۝٣

(7:3) [0 men!] Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and follow no masters other than Him. (4) Little are you admonished.

(4) The central theme of the whole surah, and of the present discourse, is the guidance which man needs in order to live a wholesome life, the knowledge which he requires in order to understand the reality of the universe and his own being and the purpose of his existence; the principles which he needs to serve as the basis for morality and social life as well as culture and civilization. In this regard man should look to God alone and follow exclusively, the Guidance which He has communicated to mankind through His Messenger. To look to anyone other than God is dangerous for it has always spelled disaster in the past, and will always spell disaster in the future. In this verse the word awliya' (masters) refers to those whom one follows, regardless of whether one idolizes or curses them, and whether one acknowledges their patronship or strongly, denies it. For further explanation see Tafheem al-Quran,(Al-Shurai 42, n.6).

وَ كَ م مِّ قَن يَاَ لِكنافَجَآءَ بَ سُنَا بَيَاتًا اَو ُ قَآئِلُ نَهَ ۴

(7:4) How many a township We have destroyed! Our scourge fell upon them at night, or when they were taking midday rest.

فَمَا كَانَ دَ عۡوٰهُم اِذ جَآءَ ۡ بَ سُنَهَا اِلَّا اَ ا قَالُن ااِنَّا كُنَّا ظٰلِمِ ۡ ۵

(7:5) And when Our scourge fell upon them their only cry was: 'We are indeed transgressors.' (5)

(5) People can learn a lesson from the tragic fate of those nations that spurned God's Guidance. and instead followed the guidance of others; and they became so degenerate that their very existence became an intolerable burden on the earth. Eventually, God's scourge seized them. and the earth was cleansed of their filthy existence.

The words uttered by, the evil-doers: 'We are indeed transgressors', emphasizes two points, First, that it is pointless for one to realize and repent of one's wrong-doing after the time for such repentance is past. Individuals and communities who allow the term granted to them to be wasted in heedlessness and frivolity, who turn a deaf ear to those who invite them to the truth, have so often been overtaken in the past by God's punishment. Second, there are numerous instances of individuals as well as communities which incontrovertibly prove that when the wrong-doings of a nation exceed a certain limit, the term granted to it expires and God's punishment suddenly overtakes it. And once a nation is subjected to God's punishment, there is no escape from it. Since human history abounds in such instances, there is no reason why people should persist in the same iniquity, and repent only when the time for repentance has passed.

فَلَنَسْـَٔلَنَّ الَّذِيْنَ اُرْسِلَ اِلَيْهِمْ وَلَنَسْـَٔلَنَّ الْمُرْسَلِيْنَ ۝٦

(7:6) So We shall call to account those to whom Messengers were sent, [6] and We shall call to account the Messengers (to see how dutifully they conveyed the Message, and how people responded to it). [7]

(6) The words 'call to account' refers to the questioning people will be subjected to on the Day of Judgement. For it is the reckoning on the Day, of Judgement that really matters. Punishment dealt upon corrupt individuals and communities in this world does not constitute their true punishment. Punishment in this world is no more than what happens when a criminal, who has been strutting scot-free, is suddenly arrested. The arrest constitutes no more than depriving the criminal of the opportunity to perpetrate further crimes. The annals of history are filled with instances where corrupt nations have been punished, proving that man has not been granted absolute license to go about doing whatever he pleases. Rather, there is a Power above all that allows man to act freely but only to a certain extent, no more. And when man exceeds those limits, that Power administers a series of warnings in order that he might heed the warnings and give up his wickedness. But when man fails totally to respond to such warnings, he is punished.

Anyone who considers the events of history, will conclude that the Lord of the universe must have certainly appointed a Day of Judgement in order to hold the wrong-doers to account for their actions and to punish them. That the Qur'an refers to the recurrent punishment of wicked nations as an argument in support of the establishment of the final judgement in the Hereafter is evidenced by the fact that the present (Verse- 6)- opens with the word so'.

(7) This shows that on the Day of Judgement Prophethood will be the main basis of reckoning. On the one hand, the Prophets will be questioned about the efforts they made to convey God's Message to mankind. On the other hand, the people to whom the Prophets were sent will be questioned about their response to the

message. The Qur'an is not explicit about how judgements will be made with regard to individuals and communities who did not receive God's Message. It seems that God has left judgement - to borrow a contemporary judicial expression - reserved. However, with regard to individuals and communities who did receive God's Message through the Prophets, the Qur'an states explicitly, that they will have no justification whatsoever to put forward a defense of their disbelief and denial, of their transgression and disobedience. They are doomed to be east into Hell in utter helplessness and dejection.

فَلَنَقُصَّنَّ عَلَيۡهِم بِعِلۡمٖ وَّمَا كُنَّا غَآئِبِينَ ٧

(7:7) Then We shall narrate to them with knowledge the whole account. For surely, We were not away from them.

وَالۡوَزۡنُ يَوۡمَئِذِ ٱلۡحَقُّ فَمَن ثَقُلَتۡ مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ٨

(7:8) The weighing on that Day will be the true weighing: (8) those whose scales are heavy will prosper.

(8) This means that when the Balance is fixed on the Day of Judgement, 'truth' and weight will be identical. The more truth one has to one's credit, the more truth one has to one's credit, the more the weight in one's scale; and vice versa. One will be judged solely on the basis of this weight. In other words, no consideration other than truth will enter into the calculation. A life of falsehood, however long it lasted, and however full of worldly achievements, will carry no weight at all. Weighed in the Balance, the devotees of falsehood will discover that their life-long deeds do not even weigh so much as a birds feather. The same point has been expatiated upon in (Al-Kahf 18:103-5) : 'Shall We tell you of those who are greatest losers in respect of their deeds? It is those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they kept believing that they were acquiring good by their deeds. they are those who deny the Signs of their Lord and the fact of their having to meet Him (in the Hereafter). So their works are in vain and we shall attach no weight to them on the Day of Judgement.'

وَ مَنۡ خَفَّ مَوَازِيۡنُهٗ فَاُولٰٓئِكَ الَّذِيۡنَ خَسِرُوۡۤا اَنۡفُسَهُمۡ بِمَا كَانُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا يَظۡلِمُوۡنَ ۹

(7:9) and those whose scales are light will be the losers, (9) for they, are the ones who have been unjust to Our signs.

(9) For a full appreciation of this point it is necessary, to remember that man's deeds will be classified into positive and negative categories. The positive category will consist of knowing the truth, believing in it, acting upon it, and striving to make it prevail. It is such acts alone which will have weight in the Hereafter. Conversely, whenever someone follows and goes after lusts or blindly follows other humans or satans, his acts will be reckoned as 'negative'. Such acts will not only be of no value at all, but will also have the effect of reducing the total weight of one's positive acts.

Thus, a man's success in the Hereafter requires that his good acts outweigh his evil ones to such an extent that even if his evil acts cause the effacement of some of his good acts, he should still have enough left in his credit to ensure his scale is inclined towards the positive. As for the man whose evil acts outweigh his good acts, he will be like the bankrupt businessman who, even after spending all his assets, remains under the burden of debt.

وَ لَقَدۡ مَكَّنّٰكُمۡ فِى الۡاَرۡضِ وَ جَعَلۡنَا لَكُمۡ فِيۡهَا مَعَايِشَ ؕ قَلِيۡلًا مَّا تَشۡكُرُوۡنَ ۱۰

(7:10) We assuredly established you in the earth and arranged for your livelihood in it. Little do you give thanks.

وَ لَقَدۡ خَلَقۡنٰكُمۡ ثُمَّ صَوَّرۡنٰكُمۡ ثُمَّ قُلۡنَا لِلۡمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اسۡجُدُوۡا لِاٰدَمَ ۟ فَسَجَدُوۡۤا اِلَّاۤ اِبۡلِيۡسَ ؕ لَمۡ يَكُنۡ مِّنَ السّٰجِدِيۡنَ ۱۱

(7:11) We initiated your creation, then We gave you each a shape, and then We said to the angels: 'Prostrate before Adam.') (10) They all prostrated except Iblis: he was not one of those who fell Prostrate.

(10) These verses should he read in conjunction with (Al-Baqarah 2: 30-9). The words in which the command to prostrate before Adam is mentioned may give rise to the misapprehension that it was Adam as such who is the object of prostration. This misapprehension should be removed by what has been said here. The text makes it very clear that prostration before Adam was in his capacity, as the representative of all mankind and not in his personal capacity.

The successive stages of man's creation mentioned in the present verse ('We initiated your creation, then We gave you each a shape'), means that God first planned the creation of man, made ready the necessary materials for it, and then gave those materials a human form. Then, when man had assumed the status of a living being, God asked the angels to prostrate before him. The Qur'an says: And recall when your Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man from clay. When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit then fall You down in prostration before him' (Sad 38: 71-2).

Mention has been made in these verses, though in a different way, of the same three stages of creation: man's creation from clay; giving him a proportionate human shape; and bringing Adam into existence by breathing into him God's spirit. The following verses also have the same import:

And recall when your Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man, from sounding clay molded into shape from black mud. When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you all down in prostration before him' (al-Hijr 15: 28-9).

It is quite difficult for one to appreciate fully the details of the origin of man's creation. We cannot fully grasp how man was created out of the elements drawn from the earth; how he was given a form and a well-proportioned one at that and how God's Spirit was breathed into him. It is quite obvious, though, that the Qur'anic version of man's creation is sharply at odds with the

theory, of creation propounded by Darwin and his followers in our time. Darwinism explains man's creation in terms of his evolution from a variety of non-human and sub-human stages culminating in homo sapiens. It draws no clear demarcation line that would mark the end of the non-human stage of evolution and the beginning of the species called 'man'. Opposed to this is the Qur'anic version of man's creation where man starts his career from the very beginning as an independent species, having in his entire history no essential relationship at all with any non-human species. Also, man is conceived as having been invested by God with full consciousness and enlightenment from the very start of his life.

These are two different doctrines regarding the past of the human species. Both these doctrines give rise to two variant conceptions about man. If one were to adopt the Darwinian doctrine, man is conceived as essentially a species of the animal genre. Acceptance of this doctrine leads man to derive the guiding principles of his life, including moral principles, from the laws governing animal life. Given the basic premises of such a doctrine, animal-like behavior is to be considered quite natural for man. The only, difference between man and animal lies in the fact that animals act without the help of the tools and instruments used by humans, and their behavior is devoid of culture.

Were one to accept the other doctrine, man would be conceived as a totally, distinct category. Man is no longer viewed simply as a talking or gregarious animal. He is rather seen as God's Vicegerent on earth. What distinguishes man from other animals, according to this doctrine, is not his capacity to speak or his gregariousness but the moral responsibility and trust with which he has been invested. Thus, one's whole perspective with regard to man and everything relating to him is changed. Rather than looking downwards to species of being lower than the human, man will turn his gaze upwards. It is claimed by some that however dignified the Qur'anic doctrine might be from a moral and psychological point of view, Darwinism should still be preferred on the basis of its being scientifically established. However, the very claim that Darwinism has been scientifically

established is itself questionable. Only those who have a very superficial acquaintance with modern science can entertain the misconception that the Darwinian theory of evolution has been scientifically, established. Those who know better are fully, aware that despite the vast paraphernalia of evidence in its support, it remains merely a hypothesis. The arguments marshalled in support of this theory at best succeed in establishing it as a possibility, but certainly not as an incontrovertible fact. Hence at the most what can he said is that the evolution of the species is as much a possibility as its direct creation.

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ اَلَّا تَسۡجُدَ اِذۡ اَمَرۡتُكَ ؕ قَالَ اَنَا خَيۡرٌ مِّنۡهُ ۚ خَلَقۡتَنِىۡ مِنۡ نَّارٍ وَّ خَلَقۡتَهٗ مِنۡ طِيۡنٍ ﴿۱۲﴾

(7:12) Allah said: 'What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you to do so?' He said: 'I am better than he. You created me from fire, and him You created from clay.'

قَالَ فَاهۡبِطۡ مِنۡهَا فَمَا يَكُوۡنُ لَكَ اَنۡ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيۡهَا فَاخۡرُجۡ اِنَّكَ مِنَ الصّٰغِرِيۡنَ ﴿۱۳﴾

(7:13) Allah said: 'Then get you down from here. It does not behoove you to be arrogant here. So be gone. You will be among the humiliated.' (11)

(11) Implicit in the Quranic expression (Sagarin) is the idea of contentment with one's disgrace and indignity, for Saghir is he who invites disgrace and indignity, upon himself. Now, Satan was a victim of vanity and pride, and for that very reason defied God's command to prostrate himself before Adam. Satan was therefore, guilty of self-inflicted degradation. False pride, baseless notions of glory, ill-founded illusions of greatness failed to confer any greatness upon him. They could only bring upon him disgrace and indignity. Satan could blame none but himself for this sordid end.

قَالَ اَنۡظِرۡنِىۡۤ اِلٰى يَوۡمِ يُبۡعَثُوۡنَ ﴿۱۴﴾

(7:14) Satan replied: 'Give me respite till the Day they shall be raised.'

قَالَ اِنَّکَ مِنَ الۡمُنۡظَرِیۡنَ ۱۵

(7:15) Allah said: 'You are granted respite.'

قَالَ فَبِمَا اَ غۡوَ يۡتَنِىۡ لَاَ قۡعُدَنَّ لَهُمۡ صِرَاطَكَ الۡمُسۡتَقِيۡمَ ۙ﴿۱۶﴾

(7:16) Satan said: 'Since You have led me astray, I shall surely sit in ambush for them on Your Straight Path.

ثُمَّ لَاٰتِيَنَّهُمۡ مِّنۡۢ بَيۡنِ اَيۡدِيۡهِمۡ وَمِنۡ خَلۡفِهِمۡ وَعَنۡ اَيۡمَانِهِمۡ وَعَنۡ شَمَآئِلِهِمۡ ؕ وَلَا تَجِدُ اَكۡثَرَهُمۡ شٰكِرِيۡنَ ﴿۱۷﴾

(7:17) Then I will come upon them from the front and from the rear, and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them thankful.' (12)

(12) This was the challenge thrown down by Satan to God. What it meant is that Satan would make use of the respite granted to him until the Last Day, and he would do so in order to prove that nian did not deserve a position superior to his and this had after all been bestowed upon him by God. So doing, he would expose how ungrateful, thankless and disloyal a creature man is.

The respite asked for by Satan and granted to him by God includes not only the time but also the opportunity to mislead Man and to prove his point by appealing to man's weaknesses. The Qur'an makes a pointed statement about this in (Banu Israil 17: 61-5). These verses make it clear that God had granted Satan the opportunity to try to mislead Adam and his offspring At the same time it has also been made quite clear that Satan was not granted the power to lead men into error against their will. 'As for my servants', says the Qur'an, 'you shall have no power over them' (Banu Israil 17: 65). Thus all that Satan can do is to cause misunderstanding, to make people cherish false illusions, to make evil and error seem attractive, and to invite people to evil ways by holding out to them the promise of immense pleasure and material benefits. He would have no power, however, to forcibly pull them to the Satanic way and to prevent them from following the Right Way. Accordingly, the Qur'an makes it quite plain elsewhere that on the Day of Judgement, Satan would address the men who had followed him in the following words: 'I had no power over you except to call you; but you listened to me: then reproach me not, but reproach your own selves' (Ibrahim 14: 22).

As for Satan's allegation that God Himself caused him to fall into error see (Verse 16) it is an attempt on the part of Satan to transfer the blame which falls squarely on him to God. Satan's grievance seems to be that God was responsible for his deviation insofar as He hurt Satan's pride by asking him to prostrate before Adam, and that it was this which led him to disobey God. It is thus clear that Satan wanted to continue enjoying his vain arrogance and that he was incensed that his weakness - arrogance - was seen through and brought to full light. The underlying stupidity of the statement is too patently obvious to call for any refutation, and hence God took no notice of it.

قَالَ ٱخۡرُجۡ مِنۡهَا مَذۡءُومٗا مَّدۡحُورٗاۖ لَّمَن تَبِعَكَ مِنۡهُمۡ لَأَمۡلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنكُمۡ أَجۡمَعِينَ ١٨

(7:18) Allah said: 'Go away from here - disgraced and expelled. I shall fill the Hell with all those that follow you.

وَيَٰٓـَٔادَمُ ٱسۡكُنۡ أَنتَ وَزَوۡجُكَ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنۡ حَيۡثُ شِئۡتُمَا وَلَا تَقۡرَبَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٩

(7:19) O Adam! Live you and your spouse in the Garden and both of you eat from it wherever you will, but never approach the tree or you shall become wrongdoers.'

فَوَسۡوَسَ لَهُمَا ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ لِيُبۡدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُۥرِيَ عَنۡهُمَا مِن سَوۡءَٰتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَىٰكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنۡ هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّآ أَن تَكُونَا مَلَكَيۡنِ أَوۡ تَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلۡخَٰلِدِينَ ٢٠

(7:20) But Satan made an evil suggestion to both of them that he might reveal to them their shame that had remained hidden from them. He said: 'Your Lord has forbidden you to approach this tree only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals.'

وَ قَاسَمَهُمَاۤ اِنِّیۡ لَکُمَا لَمِنَ النّٰصِحِیۡنَ ۙ﴿۲۱﴾

(7:21) And he swore to them both: 'Surely I am your sincere adviser.'

فَدَلّٰىهُمَا بِغُرُوۡرٍ ۚ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَۃَ بَدَتۡ لَهُمَا سَوۡاٰتُهُمَا وَ طَفِقَا یَخۡصِفٰنِ عَلَیۡهِمَا مِنۡ وَّرَقِ الۡجَنَّۃِ ؕ وَ نَادٰىهُمَا رَبُّهُمَاۤ اَلَمۡ اَنۡهَکُمَا عَنۡ تِلۡکُمَا الشَّجَرَۃِ وَ اَقُلۡ لَّکُمَاۤ اِنَّ الشَّیۡطٰنَ لَکُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُّبِیۡنٌ ﴿۲۲﴾

(7:22) Thus Satan brought about their fall by deceit. And when they tasted of the tree, their shame became visible to them, and both began to cover themselves with leaves from the Garden. Then their Lord called out to them: 'Did I not forbid you from that tree, and did I not warn you that Satan 'is your declared enemy?'

قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمۡنَاۤ اَنۡفُسَنَا ٭ وَ اِنۡ لَّمۡ تَغۡفِرۡ لَنَا وَ تَرۡحَمۡنَا لَنَکُوۡنَنَّ مِنَ الۡخٰسِرِیۡنَ ﴿۲۳﴾

(7:23) Both cried out: 'Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and do not have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the losers.' (13)

(13) The narrative sheds light on the following significant points:

(i) Modesty and bashfulness are inherent in human nature. The primary manifestation of this instinct is seen in the sense of shame that one feels when one is required to expose the private parts of one's body in the presence of others. According to the Qur'an, this bashfulness is not artificial, nor an outcome of advancement in human culture and civilization. Nor is it something acquired as some misguided thinkers contend. On the contrary, modesty has been an integral part of human nature from the very beginning.

(ii) The very first stratagem adopted by Satan in his bid to lead man astray from the Right Path consisted of undermining man's sense of modesty, to direct him towards lewdness and make him sexually deviant. In other words, the sexual instincts of man were taken by Satan as the most vulnerable aspect of human nature. Accordingly, he sought to weaken man's natural

instincts of modesty and bashfulness. This devilish stratagem is still followed by the disciples of Satan in our time. For them, progress is inconceivable without exposing woman to the gaze of all and making her strip before others in one form or another.

(iii) Such is human nature that man scarcely responds to an unambiguous invitation to evil. Those who seek to propagate evil are, therefore, forced to present themselves as sincere well-wishers of humanity.

(iv) Man is naturally, drawn towards lofty ideals such as the attainment of superhuman positions and the securing of immortality. Satan achieved his first victory in his bid to mislead man by appealing to the latter's inherent desire to attain immortality. Satan's most effective weapon is to promise man a more elevated position than his present one, and then set him on a course that leads instead to his degradation.

(v) Here the Qur'an refutes the fairly popular view that Satan first misled Eve and later used her as an instrument to mislead Adam. (See Ibn Kathir's comments on (verses 22-3 - Ed.) The Qur'anic version of the story is that Satan attempted to mislead both Adam and Eve, and in fact both fell prey to his guile. At first sight, this might seem of trivial significance. However, all those who are acquainted with the impact of this version of Adam's fall on the moral, legal and social degradation of women will appreciate the significance of this Qur'anic statement.

(vi) There is hardly any basis to assume that the forbidden tree had certain inherent qualities which could result in the exposure of Adam and Eve's private parts as soon as they had tasted its fruit. Instead of the forbidden tree possessing any extraordinary qualities, it was rather man's disobedience to God which led to his fall from his original state. Initially, Adam and Eve's private parts had remained hidden on account of special arrangements made by God. Once they disobeyed, they were deprived of that special Divine arrangement, and were left to themselves to cover their nakedness if they so wished.

(vii) This was a way, of conveying to mankind for all time that whenever he disobeys God, he will sooner or later be exposed; that man will enjoy God's support and protection only so long as he remains obedient to Him. Once man transgresses the bounds of his obedience, he will be deprived of God's care and

protection and left to his own self. This idea is also embodied in many traditions from the Prophet (peace be on him). According to a tradition, the Prophet (peace be on him) prayed:

'O God! I seek Your Mercy. Do not leave me to my own care even for the wink of an eye!' (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 5, P. 421 - Ed.)

(viii) Satan wanted to prove that man did not deserve, not even for a moment, the superior status which had been granted to him by God. However, Satan failed in the very first round of his efforts to discredit man. Granted, man did not fully succeed in obeying God's command; rather, he fell prey to the machinations of his arch-enemy, Satan, and deviated from the path of obedience. Nevertheless, it is evident even in the course of this first encounter that man is a morally superior being. This is clear from many a thing. First, whereas Satan laid claim to superiority, man made no such claim rather a superior status was bestowed upon him by God. Second, Satan disobeyed God out of sheer pride and arrogance. But far from openly revolting against God out of his own prompting, man was disobedient under Satan's evil influence. Third, when man disobeyed God, he did so unwittingly, not realizing that he was committing a sin. 'Man was beguiled into disobedience by Satan ,who appeared in the garb of man's well-wisher. It was Satan who persuaded him to believe that in the fruit of the forbidden tree lay his good, that his action would lead him to the heights of goodness, not to the depths of evil. Fourth, when Satan was warned, rather than confessing his mistake and repenting, he clung even more adamantly to disobedience. But when man was told that he had sinned, he did not resort to continued transgression as Satan did. As soon as man realized his mistake, he confessed his fault, returned to the course of obedience and sought refuge in God's mercy.

This story draws a clear line between the way of Satan and the way that befits man. Satan's way is characterized by rebellion against God, by arrogantly persisting in that rebellion even after having been warned, and by trying to mislead the righteously disposed towards sin and disobedience. As opposed to this, the way that befits man is to resist the evil promptings of Satan and to be constantly vigilant against Satanic machinations. But, if in

spite of all these precautions, a man does swerve from the course of obedience, he should turn, as soon as he realizes his fault, to God in penitence and remorse and make amends.

This is the lesson that God conveys to man through this anecdote. The Qur'an seeks to impress upon the opponents of the Prophet (peace be on him) that the way, they are following is the way of Satan. To become indifferent to God's Guidance, to take satans among men and jinn as their protectors and to persist in disobedience despite repeated warnings, amounts to adopting a Satanic attitude. It demonstrates that they have fallen prey to the snares of the arch-enemy and have been totally overpowered by him. This attitude will lead to their total undoing just as it led to Satan's undoing. Anyone who has even an iota of understanding should heed and emulate the example of his fore parents - Adam and Eve - who repented and made amends after their disobedience.

قَالَ اهۡبِطُوۡا بَعۡضُكُمۡ لِبَعۡضٍ عَدُوٌّ ۚ وَ لَكُمۡ فِى الۡاَرۡضِ مُسۡتَقَرٌّ وَّ مَتَاعٌ اِلٰى حِيۡنٍ ﴿۲۴﴾

(7:24) Allah said: 'Go down; [14] you are enemies one of the other. For you there is dwelling and provision on the earth for a while.'

(14) God's command that Adam and Eve 'go down' should not be misunderstood to mean that their departure from Paradise was by way of punishment. The Qur'an has made it clear many a time that God accepted Adam and Eve's repentance and pardoned them. Thus the order does not imply punishment. It rather signifies the fulfilment of the purpose for which man was created. (For elaboration see Towards Understanding the Qur'an, vol. 1, (Al-Baqarah 2: nn. 48 and 53, pp. 63-4 and 66 - Ed.)

قَالَ فِيۡهَا تَحۡيَوۡنَ وَفِيۡهَا تَمُوۡتُوۡنَ وَمِنۡهَا تُخۡرَجُوۡنَ ﴿۲۵﴾

(7:25) He continued: 'You shall live there, and there shall you die, and from it you shall be raised to life.'

يٰبَنِيْٓ اٰدَمَ قَدْ اَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُّوَارِيْ سَوْاٰتِكُمْ وَرِيْشًا ۗ وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوٰى ذٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ۗ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ اٰيٰتِ اللّٰهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُوْنَ ٢٦

(7:26) O Children of Adam! (15) Indeed We have sent down to you a garment which covers your shame and provides protection and adornment. But the finest of all is the garment of piety. That is one of the signs of Allah so that they may take heed.

(15) By referring to an important aspect of Adam and Eve's story, the attention of the people of Arabia of those days was drawn to the evil influence of Satan upon their lives. Under Satan's influence they had begun to see dress merely as a shield of protection against the in clemencies of the weather and as a means of adornment. The basic purpose of dress to cover the private parts of the body - had receded into the background. People had no inhibition about the immodest exposure of the private parts of their body in public. To publicly take a bath absolutely naked, to attend to the call of nature on thoroughfares, were the order of the day. To crown it all, in the course of Pilgrimage they used to circumambulate around the Kabah in stark nakedness. Women even surpassed men in immodesty. In their view, the performance of religious rites in complete nudity was an act of religious merit.

Immodesty, however, was not an exclusive characteristic of the people of Arabia. Many nations indulged in it in the past, and many nations continue to indulge in it even now. Hence the message embodied in these verses is not directed just to the people of Arabia. It is rather directed to all men. Mankind, which is the progeny of Adam, is warned against this particular aspect of Satanic influence on their lives. When men show indifference to God's Guidance and turn away from the Message of the Prophets, they virtually place themselves at the mercy of Satan. For it is Satan who makes them abandon way's that are consistent with true human nature and who leads them to immodesty in the same way he did with Adam and Eve. Were man to reflect on this, it would become quite evident that when he is deprived of the guidance of the Prophets, he cannot even appreciate, let alone fulfil, the primary requirements of his true nature.

يٰبَنِيْٓ اٰدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطٰنُ كَمَآ اَخْرَجَ اَبَوَيْكُمْ مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنْزِعُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوْاٰتِهِمَا ۭ اِنَّهٗ يَرٰىكُمْ هُوَ وَقَبِيْلُهٗ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ ۭ اِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّيٰطِيْنَ اَوْلِيَاۗءَ لِلَّذِيْنَ لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ۲۷

(7:27) Children of Adam! Let not Satan deceive you in the manner he deceived your parents out of Paradise, pulling off from them their clothing to reveal to them their shame. He and his host surely see you from whence you do not see them. We have made satans the guardians of those who do not believe. (16)

(16) These verses bring into focus several important points.

First, that the need to cover oneself is not an artificial urge in man; rather it is an important dictate of human nature. Unlike animals, God did not provide man with the protective covering that He provided to animals. God rather endowed man with the natural instincts of modesty and bashfulness. Moreover, the private parts of the body are not only, related to sex, but also constitute 'sawat' that is, something the exposure of which is felt to be shameful. Also, God did not provide man with a natural covering in response to man's modesty and bashfulness, but has inspired in him see (Verse 26)the urge to cover himself. This is in order that man might use his reason to understand the requirements of his nature, use the resources made available by God, and provide himself a dress.

Second, man instinctively knows that the moral purpose behind the use of dress takes precedence over the physical purpose. Hence the idea that man should resort to dress in order to cover his private parts precedes the mention of dress as a means of providing protection and adornment to the human body. In this connection man is altogether different from animals, With regard to the latter, the natural covering that has been granted serves to protect them from the in clemencies of weather and also to beautify their bodies. However, that natural covering is altogether unrelated to the purpose of concealing their sexual organs. The exposure of those organs is not a matter of shame for them and hence their nature is altogether devoid of the urge to cover them. However, as men fell prey to Satanic influences, they

developed a false and unhealthy notion about the function of dress. They were led to believe that the function of dress for human beings is no different from that for animals, viz., to protect them from the in clemencies of weather and to make them look attractive. As for concealing the private parts of the body, the importance of that function has been belittled. For men have been misled into believing that their private parts are, in fact, like other organs of their body. As in the case of animals, there is little need for human beings to conceal their sex organs.

Third, the Qur'an emphasizes that it is not enough for the dress to cover the private parts and to provide protection and adornment to the human body. Man's dress ought to be the dress of piety. This means that a man's dress ought to conceal his private parts. It should also render a man reasonably presentable - the dress being neither too shabby and cheap nor overly expensive and extravagant relative to his financial standing. Nor should dress smack of pride or hauteur, or reflect that pathological mental state in which men prefer characteristically feminine dresses and vice versa: or that the people belonging to one nation mimic people of other nations so as to resemble them, thereby becoming a living emblem of collective humiliation and abasement. The Qur'anic ideal can only be achieved by those who truly believe in the Prophets and sincerely try to follow God's Guidance. For as soon as man decides to reject God's Guidance, Satan assumes his patronage and by one means or another manages to lead him into error after error.

Fourth, the question of dress constitutes one of the numerous signs of God which is visible virtually throughout the world. When the facts mentioned above are carefully considered it will be quite clear as to why dress is an important sign of God.

وَ اِذَا فَعَلُوۡا فَاحِشَۃً قَالُوۡا وَجَدۡنَا عَلَیۡہَاۤ اٰبَآءَنَا وَ اللّٰہُ اَمَرَنَا بِہَا ؕ قُلۡ اِنَّ اللّٰہَ لَا یَاۡمُرُ بِالۡفَحۡشَآءِ ؕ اَتَقُوۡلُوۡنَ عَلَی اللّٰہِ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُوۡنَ ﴿۲۸﴾

(7:28) And when such people commit an indecent act they say: 'We found our fathers doing that, and Allah has enjoined it on

us. (17) Say: 'Surely Allah never enjoins any indecency. (18) Do you say things regarding Allah that you do not know?'

(17) This refers to the pre-islamic Arabian practice of circumambulating around the Kabah in stark nakedness. The people of those day's thought that nakedness during circumambulation had been enjoined by God.

(18) The simple and succinct Qur'anic statement that 'Allah never enjoins any, indecency' (Verse 29)stands as the overwhelming argument against many false beliefs that were entertained by the people of Arabia. For a fuller appreciation of this argument the following points should be kept in mind:

First, that the people of Arabia totally stripped themselves while performing certain religious rites under the mistaken notion that it had been so enjoined. But on the other hand they were agreed that nudity was a shameful thing so that no Arab of any standing could ever approve of appearing naked in any respectable assembly or market-place.

Second, notwithstanding their reservation about nudity, they strippeel themselves totally while performing certain religious rites on the ground that religion was from God. Hence there was nothing objectionable about performing a religious act in a state of nakedness for God had so enjoined them regarding the performance of that rite. Here the Qur'an confronts them with a clear question: How can they believe that God could order them to do something which involves nakedness and which they know to be inherently shameful? What is implied is that God could not command them to commit indecency, and if their religion contained elements of indecency then this is positive proof of its not being from God.

قُلۡ اَمَرَ رَبِّیۡ بِالۡقِسۡطِ ۫ وَ اَقِیۡمُوۡا وُجُوۡهَکُمۡ عِنۡدَ کُلِّ مَسۡجِدٍ وَّ ادۡعُوۡهُ مُخۡلِصِیۡنَ لَهُ الدِّیۡنَ ؕ کَمَا بَدَاَکُمۡ تَعُوۡدُوۡنَ ؕ ۲۹

(7:29) Say to them (O Muhammad): 'My Lord enjoins justice; and that you set your faces right at the time of every

Prayer; and that you call upon Him, exclusively dedicating your faith to Him. You shall return to Him as you were created.' (19)

(19) The verse seeks to suggest that God has nothing to do with their foolish rituals. So far as the religion truly prescribed by Him is concerned, its fundamental principles are the following:

(1) That man should base his life on justice and righteousness.

(2) That man's worship should have the right orientation, i.e. that it should he directed to God alone and should be free of every trace of devotion to others than God, that man should reserve his absolute enthrallment and bondage for the One True God alone. All these should have only one direction - the One that is truly worthy of worship.

(3) Man should invoke God alone to keep him rightly directed, to grant him help and succor, to favor him with protection and security. This should be done provided one's life is oriented to serving God. Invoking help from God would be ludicrous if man's life is based on unbelief, polytheism, disobedience to God, or serving a variety of gods other than the One True God. Such a prayer would amount to asking God's help in strengthening one in one's rebellion against Him.

(4) That man should have full conviction that in the same way as God caused him to be born in the world, He will also restore him to life after death and will make him stand before Himself so as to render an account of his life.

فَرِيقًا هَدٰى وَ فَرِيقًا حَقَّ عَلَيۡهِمُ الضَّلٰلَةُ ؕ اِنَّهُمُ اتَّخَذُوا الشَّيٰطِيۡنَ اَوۡلِيَآءَ مِنۡ دُوۡنِ اللّٰهِ وَ يَحۡسَبُوۡنَ اَنَّهُمۡ مُّهۡتَدُوۡنَ ﴿۳۰﴾

(7:30) A party He has guided to the Right Way, and for another party straying is justly its due for they have taken satans, rather than Allah, as their guardians, even though they think that they are rightly-guided.

يٰبَنِىۡۤ اٰدَمَ خُذُوۡا زِيۡنَتَكُمۡ عِنۡدَ كُلِّ مَسۡجِدٍ وَّ كُلُوۡا وَ اشۡرَبُوۡا وَ لَا تُسۡرِفُوۡا ۚ اِنَّهٗ لَا يُحِبُّ الۡمُسۡرِفِيۡنَ ﴿۳۱﴾

(7:31) Children of Adam! Take your adornment at every time of Prayer; [20] and eat and drink without going to excesses. For Allah does not like those who go to excess. [21]

(20) The word zina which occurs in this verse refers to full and proper dress. While performing Prayer people are required not only to cover the private parts of their body, but also to wear a dress that serves the two-fold purpose of covering and giving one a decent appearance.

The directive to pray in a proper and decent dress is aimed at refuting the misconception entertained by ignorant people down the ages that man should worship God either in a nude or semi-naked state, or at least have a shabby and unkempt appearance while worshipping. In this verse people are being told the opposite of this. At the time of worship they should not only be free from all kinds of nudity and indecency, but should also be in a decent dress.

(21) God does not want to subject man to want and misery or starvation or to deprive him as such of the good things of this worldly life. On the contrary, it pleases Him that man should appear in good decent dress and enjoy the clean food provided for him by God. There is nothing sinful in that. As for sin, it consists in transgressing the bounds set by God. This transgression could be committed in both ways: by making the unlawful lawful, or by making the lawful unlawful.

قُ لۡ مَنۡ حَرَّمَ زِيۡنَةَ اللّٰهِ الَّتِىۡۤ اَخۡرَجَ لِعِبَادِهٖ وَالطَّيِّبٰتِ مِنَ الرِّزۡقِ ؕ قُ لۡ هِىَ لِلَّذِيۡنَ اٰمَنُوۡا
فِى الۡحَيٰوةِ الدُّنۡيَا خَالِصَةً يَّوۡمَ الۡقِيٰمَةِ ؕ كَذٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الۡاٰيٰتِ لِقَوۡمٍ يَّعۡلَمُوۡنَ ۳۲

(7:32) Say (O Muhammad): 'Who has forbidden the adornment which Allah has brought forth for His creatures or the good things from among the means of sustenance?' [22] Say: 'These are for the enjoyment of the believers in this world, and shall be exclusively theirs on the Day of Resurrection.' [23] Thus do We clearly expound Our revelations for those who have knowledge.

(22) Since it is God Himself Who has created all good and pure things for man, it obviously could not have been His intent to make them unlawful. Now, if there is any religion, or any ethical or social system which forbids those things, or considers them an insurmountable barrier to man's spiritual growth, it has an intellectual orientation which itself is evident proof of its not having been prescribed by God.

This is an important argument which the Qur'an advances in refutation of false creeds. An appreciation of this argument would help one understand the Qur'anic line of argumentation as such.

(23) All the clean and beautiful things created by God are meant, in principle, for the believers even in this world, for they are God's faithful subjects, and it is fidelity to God that makes one deserve enjoyment of the things which are God's. However, all men are under a test in this world. Hence even those who are disloyal to God have been granted respite to mend their ways and are, therefore, not denied His worldly bounties. In fact with a view to testing those disloyal to God these bounties are at times lavished upon them even more abundantly than on God's faithful servants. But the character of the Next Life will be totally different. For one's station there will be determined entirely by one's righteousness and justice. God's bounties in the Next Life, therefore, will be for the faithful alone. As for the unfaithful, those who were disloyal to God even though every fibre of their being was nourished by the sustenance provided by Him, they will have no share whatsoever of those bounties in the Next Life.

قُلۡ اِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّیَ الۡفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنۡهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ وَالۡاِثۡمَ وَالۡبَغۡیَ بِغَیۡرِ الۡحَقِّ وَاَنۡ تُشۡرِکُوۡا بِاللّٰهِ مَا لَمۡ یُنَزِّلۡ بِهٖ سُلۡطٰنًا وَّاَنۡ تَقُوۡلُوۡا عَلَی اللّٰهِ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُوۡنَ ﴿۳۳﴾

(7:33) Tell them (O Muhammad): 'My Lord has only forbidden indecent acts, whether overt or hidden; (24) all manner of sin; (25) wrongful transgression; (26) and [He has forbidden] that you associate with Allah in His divinity that for which He has sent

down no sanction; and that you ascribe to Allah things of which you have no sure knowledge that they are from Him.'

(24) For an elaboration of hidden and overt indecencies see Towards Understanding the Qur'an, vol. 11, (Al-Anam, 6: nn. 128 and 131, pp. 290-2).

(25) The word ithm denotes negligence, dereliction of duty. Athimah signifies the she-camel which, though capable of running at a fast pace, deliberately moves slowly. The meaning of the word, therefore, carries the idea of sin. Viewed in the context of man, the word convey's the sense of man's deliberate neglect of his duty to God, his failure to pursue God's good pleasure despite his having the capacity to obey and follow Him.
26. To exceed the limits set by God and to enter an area which has been declared out of bounds for man constitute rebellion and transgression. According to this definition of baghy, the charge of rebellion will apply to all those who act according to their whims rather than in accordance with the directives of God. It is applicable to those who behave as though they are the true masters of God's Kingdom, claiming for themselves the prerogatives of God. It also applies to all those who usurp the rights of others.

وَ لِكُلِّ اُمَّۃٍ اَجَلٌ فَاِذَا جَآءَ اَجَلُھُمۡ لَا یَسۡتَاۡخِرُوۡنَ سَاعَۃً وَّ لَا یَسۡتَقۡدِمُوۡنَ﴿۳۴﴾

(7:34) For every community there is an appointed term; and when its term arrives, they cannot tarry behind a moment, nor can they get ahead. (27)

(27) The expression 'fixed term' used in the verse should not give rise to the misconception that the term of a nation expires on a definite day, month or year. What the statement really means is that God has laid down a minimum proportion between the good and evil deeds of a nation. As long as that nation is able to maintain that minimum proportion, its existence is tolerated in order that it might be able to show its performance. Once a nation crosses that minimum limit, it is denied any further respite. (For further explication of this point see (Nuh 71: 4-10 and 12.)

يٰبَنِۤ اٰدَمَ اِمَّا يَاْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنْكُمْ يَقُصُّوْنَ عَلَيْكُمْ اٰيٰتِيْ ۙ فَمَنِ اتَّقٰى وَاَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُوْنَ ۝٣٥

(7:35) Children of Adam! If Messengers come to you from amongst yourselves who rehearse to you My signs, then those who shun disobedience and mend their ways shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve.

وَ الَّذِ نَ كَذَّبُوۡ ا بِاٰيٰتِنَا وَاسۡ تَكۡ بَرُوۡا عَنۡهَا اُولٰٓئِكَ اَصۡحٰبُ النَّارِ ۚ هُمۡ فِيۡهَا خٰلِدُوۡنَ ۳۶

(7:36) And those who reject Our revelations as false and turn away from them in arrogance, they shall be the inmates of Hell; and there shall they abide. (28)

(28) Reference to the continuous unremitting punishment of the unbelievers occurs invariably on occasions where the Qur'an narrates the coming down of Adam and Eve from Paradise. See (Al-Baqarah 2: 38-9); (Ta Ha 20: 123-4.) What has been said here should be considered in relation to the fact that at the very start of man's earthly life he was informed of the evil results of unbelief. (See Towards Understanding the Qur'an, vol. 1, (Ale-Imran 3: n.69, pp.268-9 - Ed.)

فَمَنۡ اَظۡلَمُ مِمَّنِ افۡتَرٰى عَلَى اللّٰهِ كَذِبًا اَوۡ كَذَّبَ بِاٰيٰتِهٖ ؕ اُولٰٓئِكَ يَنَالُهُمۡ نَصِيۡبُهُمۡ مِّنَ الۡكِتٰبِ ؕ حَتّٰۤى اِذَا جَآءَتۡهُمۡ رُسُلُنَا يَتَوَفَّوۡنَهُمۡ ۙ قَالُوۡۤا اَيۡنَ مَا كُنۡتُمۡ تَدۡعُوۡنَ مِنۡ دُوۡنِ اللّٰهِ ؕ قَالُوۡا ضَلُّوۡا عَنَّا وَ شَهِدُوۡا عَلٰۤى اَنۡفُسِهِمۡ اَنَّهُمۡ كَانُوۡا كٰفِرِيۡنَ ۳۷

(7:37) Who is more unjust then he who invents a falsehood, ascribing it to Allah, or who rejects His revelation as false? Their full portion of God's Decree shall reach them, (29) until Our deputed angels come to them to take charge of their souls, and say: 'Where are the deities now, those whom you invoked besides Allah?' They will say: 'They are all gone away from us.' And they shall bear witness against themselves that they were unbelievers.

(29) All men, whether good or bad, have been granted a definite term in this world which they will spend and obtain their share of worldly happiness and misery.

قَالَ ادۡخُلُوۡا فِىۡۤ اُمَمٍ قَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِنۡ قَبۡلِكُمۡ مِّنَ الۡجِنِّ وَ الۡاِنۡسِ فِى النَّارِ ؕ كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتۡ اُمَّةٌ لَّعَنَتۡ اُخۡتَهَا ؕ حَتّٰۤى اِذَا ادَّارَكُوۡا فِيۡهَا جَمِيۡعًا ۙ قَالَتۡ اُخۡرٰىهُمۡ لِاُوۡلٰٮهُمۡ رَبَّنَا هٰۤؤُلَآءِ اَضَلُّوۡنَا فَاٰتِهِمۡ عَذَابًا ضِعۡفًا مِّنَ النَّارِ ؕ قَالَ لِكُلٍّ ضِعۡفٌ وَّ لٰكِنۡ لَّا تَعۡلَمُوۡنَ ۳۸

(7:38) Allah will say: 'Enter the fire of Hell and join the nations of jinn and men that have gone before You.' As a nation enters Hill, it will curse the one that went before it, and when all

are gathered there, the last of them shall say of the first: 'Our Lord! These are the ones who led us astray. Let their torment be doubled in Hell-Fire.' He will answer: 'Each will have a doubled torment; although you do not know.' (30)

(30) As it is, each group of people is followed, even as it is preceded, by others. A group which inherits an error of outlook and conduct from its predecessors passes on the same, in turn, to future generations. In addition, whereas a group owes its wrong-doing partly to the wrong-doing of its predecessors, it will also be held responsible for leaving behind an evil legacy for the future generations. The Qur'an, therefore, pronounces a double punishment on such a group: it will incur punishment for its own misdeeds and also for leaving behind such a legacy for the coming generations. A number of traditions elucidate this point. According to one such tradition the Prophet (peace be on him) said: 'He who introduces a misleading innovation which does not please God and His Messenger shall be held guilty for the sins of all those who follow that innovation without lessening in the least the burden [of sins] of those who followed the innovation,' (Cf. Ibn Majah, Muqaddimat Bab Man Ahya Sunnah qad umitat, where the words are slightly different - Ed.) According to another tradition, he said: 'The responsibility for all the murders committed in the world is shared by the first son of Adam [i.e. Cain] for he was the first to have innovated murder.' (See Bukhari, Kitab al-Jana'iz, Bab Qawlih 'alay al-Salam Yu'addhab al-Mayyit bi Ba'd Buka'i ahlih 'alayh - Ed.)

We thus know that the individual or group responsible for introducing a wrong idea or practice is not only responsible to the extent of those sins, but shares the responsibility of the sins of all those who are influenced by him. As long as the evil effects of that influence continue, their sins will be continually added to his account. This also shows that a person is not only accountable for the good or bad deeds that he commits. In fact he is also accountable for the influence of those deeds on others.

This may be illustrated by considering the case of someone who indulges in unlawful sex. All those whose bad examples, evil company, and inducements to evil caused a man

to indulge in such an act have a share in the sin that he committed. The persons who influenced him in turn had been influenced by others. Were this chain of influence traced back to its ultimate origin, the blame would be fixed on the first person who demonstrated this unlawful way for satiating the sexual urge.

This does not detract from the fact that anyone who indulged in fornication is also accountable for the sin he committed. This is so because when he committed a sin he did so because he failed to make proper use of his capacity to distinguish between good and evil with which he had been endowed. He also did not pay due heed to the voice of his conscience, and mobilize the power of self-control given him. Nor did he benefit from the knowledge of good and evil transmitted to him by pious men nor was he inspired by the noble examples of the God-fearing. Nor did he learn any lesson from the evil consequences of sexual misconduct. Instead, he totally succumbed to blind sexual lust which sought gratification at all cost. This much relates to the responsibility of the person who indulged in sexual misconduct.

But there is another dimension of that person's evil conduct - his propagation of that same evil among others which ruined the lives of countless people belonging to his own generation and to the generations that follow. It is also possible that he might have been afflicted by some general disease which he then communicated to his own generation and also to the generations that followed. His sexual misconduct might also have given birth to illegitimate children, unjustly passing on the burden of their upbringing to others, and making his offspring - without any justification - co-sharers in the fortunes and even the inheritance of others. The wrong that is thus perpetrated persists for many generations. Likewise, it is also possible that the said criminal might, by his cunning, have led an innocent girl to sexually corrupt behavior. That in turn is likely to awaken evil propensities in her which wreck the lives and homes of countless families, even generations. Also, by setting an evil example for his children, relatives, friends and the society at large a fornicator is likely to cast a bad influence on people around him and infect

others with moral corruption. The evil consequences of such an act thus linger on for a long time. The moral corruption that ultimately, engulfs the society owes its origin to the person who initially introduced an evil. Justice, therefore, demands that such a culprit should also be held responsible for the subsequent evils which may be traced back to his initial act of corruption.

The same holds true for good deeds. The reward for the heritage of goodness left behind by our predecessors from the earliest times should inevitably go to the credit of those men of the past who have continually transmitted that heritage to posterity down to our own time. If our own generation takes good care of that heritage, enriches it and passes it on to the coming generation, it also deserves due reward for that. As long as our good acts leave a trace of good influence on history and continue to cast a good influence on people, mankind will reap the benefits of those acts.

This is the Qur'anic view of retribution. Every sensible person will agree that such a dispensation alone can ensure perfect justice. Appreciation of this concept should dispel the idea of those who believe that men can be fully rewarded or punished for their deeds within the confines of this worldly life. Likewise, such an appreciation should also dispel the views of those who believe that the transmigration of souls alone can ensure full justice to all men. Such people have blundered because they have neither grasped fully the nature and consequences of human acts nor the nature and requirements of perfect justice. It is obvious that the consequences of individuals' acts are not visible during their life-span - say sixty or seventy years or so. Instead, human activities, both good and evil, influence the lives of countless people belonging to countless generations. One cannot, therefore, be brought to justice during one's own lifetime, since only a small part of the consequences of those acts have yet come to the surface. Moreover, the limited possibilities available in the present world are quite inadequate for bringing people to justice. Just consider the hideous crime of someone who pushes us to a world war. As things stand, the catastrophic consequences of such a crime would affect the lives of billions of men through the

ages. Is there any punishment - physical, spiritual or material - which can be deemed even remotely, proportionate to that crime? Likewise, no worldly reward, however valuable, can adequately recompense for the noble services rendered by a philanthropist which will benefit numerous people for thousands of years.

Having viewed the question from this angle. one readily, concludes that there must necessarily be life in the Hereafter such that full justice can be meted out to everyone. Here all human beings are brought together, their full records are made available, and the reckoning is made by God Himself Whose knowledge embraces literally everything. Additionally, men should be granted unlimited spans of life, and infinite possibilities should be made available for receiving compensation.

A little reflection on this will help us see how false the doctrine of the transmigration of souls is. Those who subscribe to this doctrine fail to realize that eternal life is needed to mete out recompense to people for the deeds they commit during their relatively brief spans of life. If one were to believe in the unending cycle of life and death it would become impossible to reward or punish anyone for his actions, for each span of life would go on accumulating endlessly. The arrears would never be cleared.

وَ قَالَتۡ اُ وۡلٰٮهُمۡ لِاُ وۡلٰٮهُمۡ فَمَا كَانَ لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡنَا مِنۡ فَضۡلٍ فَذُوۡقُوا الۡعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنۡتُمۡ تَكۡسِبُوۡنَ ﴿۳۹﴾

(7:39) Then the preceding ones will say to the succeeding ones: 'You were in no way superior to us; taste, then, this torment for your deeds.' (31)

(31) In addition to the above verse, the Quran elsewhere recounts the mutual incriminations of the dwellers of Hell. For example, it occurs in Sarah al-Saba' in the following words: 'Could you but see when the wrong-doers will be made to stand before their Lord, throwing back the word (of blame) on one another! Those who had been abased will say to the arrogant ones: "Had it not been for you, we should certainly have been believers!" The arrogant ones will say, to those who had been abased: "Was it we

who kept you back from Guidance after it reached you? Nay, rather it was you yourselves who transgressed" ' (Al-Saba' 34: 31-2). This means that since the misguided people themselves were not keen on receiving the right guidance, they fell victims even more to the forces of misguidance. Out of their own excessive worldliness they chose to follow their ungodly leaders. Granted that it was the forces of misguidance which had invented ideologies such as materialism, excessive worldliness, and nationalism. But when people were attracted to these false ideologies, they did so out of their own weaknesses. These forces of evil achieved success because what they offered was to the utmost liking of the people. Again, the people who were tempted to embrace counterfeit religious ideologies were themselves to blame for falling prey to them since there was an inner urge in them to accept such ideologies. Rather than submitting to the One True God and to rigorous moral discipline, they looked for deities that would help them to achieve their worldly purposes. Naturally, they invented deities of their own liking. They also desired the intercession of those who would let them grow in worldliness and godlessness, and yet who would also ensure their redemption in the Next World. As they preferred a religion that would not make their life a bit dry, permissive religious cults which did not object to any kind of self-indulgence were developed. This establishes clearly that the external forces of evil alone are not to blame. The people who succumb to evil and error equally share the blame. This neither condones the role of those who seek to mislead others, nor detracts from the responsibility of those who choose to be misled.

اِنَّ الَّذِیۡنَ کَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰیٰتِنَا وَاسۡتَکۡبَرُوۡا عَنۡہَا لَا تُفَتَّحُ لَہُمۡ اَبۡوَابُ السَّمَآءِ وَ لَا یَدۡخُلُوۡنَ الۡجَنَّۃَ حَتّٰی یَلِجَ الۡجَمَلُ فِیۡ سَمِّ الۡخِیَاطِ ؕ وَ کَذٰلِکَ نَجۡزِی الۡمُجۡرِمِیۡنَ ۴۰

(7:40) Surely the gates of Heaven shall not be opened for those who reject Our signs as false and turn away ' from them in arrogance; nor shall they enter Paradise until a camel passes through the eye of a needle. Thus do We reward the guilty ones.

لَہُمۡ مِّنۡ جَہَنَّمَ مِہَادٌ وَّ مِنۡ فَوۡقِہِمۡ غَوَاشٍ ؕ وَ کَذٰلِکَ نَجۡزِی الظّٰلِمِیۡنَ ۴۱

(7:41) Hell shall be their bed, and also above them their covering. Thus do We reward the wrong-doers.

وَ الَّذِ ٰ ىَاٰمَنُ ٰ واوَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَ ۡ فسًا اِلَّا وُ سۡعَ ٰ هَ اُولٰٓئِكَ اَ صۡحٰبُ ا ۡلجَنَّ ٰ ُم فِ ۡ يَا
خٰلِدُو ۡ نَو ۴۲

(7:42) And those who believe and do good - We do not impose upon any of them a burden beyond his capacity. They are the people of Paradise. And there they shall abide.

وَ نَزَعۡ نَا مَا فِۡ صُدُوۡرِہِمۡ مِّنۡ غِلٍّ تَجۡ رِیۡ مِنۡ تَحۡتِہِمُ الۡاَنۡ ہٰرُ ۚ وَ قَالُوا الۡ حَمۡدُ لِلّٰہِ الَّذِیۡ ہَدٰىنَا لِ ہٰذَا ۫ وَ مَا کُنَّا لِنَ ہۡتَدِیَ لَوۡ لَاۤ اَنۡ ہَدٰىنَا اللّٰہُ ۚ لَقَدۡ جَآءَتۡ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالۡ حَقِّ ؕ وَ نُوۡدُوۡۤا اَنۡ تِلۡکُمُ الۡجَنَّۃُ اُوۡرِثۡ تُمُوۡہَا بِمَا کُنۡ تُمۡ تَعۡمَلُوۡنَ ۴۳

(7:43) We shall strip away all rancor from their hearts, (32) and rivers shall flow beneath them, and they shall say: 'All praise be to Allah Who has guided us on to this. Had it not been for Allah Who granted us guidance, we would not be on the Right Path. Surely the Messengers of our Lord did indeed come down with truth.' Then a voice will cry out to them: 'This is the Paradise which you are made to inherit as a reward for your deeds.' (33)

(32) If there develops any rancor or ill-will among good people during the course of their worldly lives, such rancor and will be removed in the Hereafter. Their hearts will be purged of all hostile feelings and they will enter Paradise as cordial friends. They will not feel envious towards those who had formerly been opposed or hostile to them that they share with them the bounties of Paradise. Significantly, 'Ali once recited this very verse and remarked: 'I wish that I and 'Uthman and Talhah and al-Zubayr will be among those about whom God has said: "And We shall take away all rancor from their hearts" ' (Verse 43). (See Qurtubi's comments on verse 43 - Ed.)

Reflection on the verse leads one to conclude that out of His mercy, God will first purge the righteous of their blemishes. This will be done before admitting them to Paradise. Thus they will enter Paradise in a state of untainted purity.

(33) This refers to something of a fine and delicate character that will take place in Paradise. Instead of boasting about their virtuous deeds which led them to Paradise, the righteous will thank and praise God profusely and acknowledge His grace and mercy without which they could never have entered Paradise. On the other hand, God will not impress His bounty upon the righteous; He will rather emphasize that Paradise is granted to them by way of compensation for their righteous conduct, that it is the fruit of their hard labor; that it is not like the crumbs of charity but a fair recompense for their striving. The subtlety

involved here is further brought into relief by the fact that the above response will not be made by God. It will rather be just announced to them.

What is said above about the Hereafter may be discerned in the attitude of the righteous in the world itself. The wicked and arrogant ones take great pride in their worldly attainments and ascribe them to their own efforts. They firmly, believe that what they have achieved is the fruit of their labor. Saved by such notions, they continue to act even more haughtily. Conversely the righteous look upon all the bounties which they receive as favors from God. Accordingly, they thank and praise Him out of gratitude. The more they are lavished with worldly favors, the more humble and generous they become. Moreover, they do not suffer from the illusion that their righteousness will certainly earn them their salvation. On the contrary, they consistently repent over their lapses and earnestly turn to God in the hope that He will pardon them out of His grace and mercy. They are always fearful of God's reckoning lest their evil deeds are found to outweigh their good deeds. According to a tradition the Prophet (peace he on him) said: 'Know well that none will be able to enter Paradise by dint of his good deeds.' When asked if that would apply to him as well, the Prophet (peace he on him) replied: 'Yes, in my case as well; unless God covers me with His mercy and favor.' (Bukhari, Kitab al-Riqaq, 'Bab al-Qasd wa a Mudawamah ala al-Amal' - Ed.)

وَنَادٰٓى اَصْحٰبُ الْجَنَّةِ اَصْحٰبَ النَّارِ اَنْ قَدْ وَجَدْنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا حَقًّا فَهَلْ وَجَدْتُّمْ مَّا وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا ؕ قَالُوْا نَعَمْ ۚ فَاَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌۢ بَيْنَهُمْ اَنْ لَّعْنَةُ اللّٰهِ عَلَى الظّٰلِمِيْنَ ﴿۴۴﴾

(7:44) And the people of Paradise shall cry to the people of Hell: 'Surely we have found our Lord's promise to us to be true. have you also found true what your Lord has promised you?' 'Yes', they shall answer; and a herald shall cry out among them: 'Allah's curse be upon the wrong-doers';

الَّذِيْنَ يَصُدُّوْنَ عَنْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ وَيَبْغُوْنَهَا عِوَجًا وَّهُمْ بِالْاٰخِرَةِ كٰفِرُوْنَ ﴿۴۵﴾

(7:45) upon those who hinder men from the path of Allah and seek to make it crooked; and disbelieve in the Hereafter.'

وَبَيۡنَهُمَا حِجَابٌ وَعَلَى الۡاَعۡرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَّعۡرِفُوۡنَ كُلًّا بِسِيۡمٰهُمۡ وَنَادَوۡا اَصۡحٰبَ الۡجَنَّةِ اَنۡ سَلٰمٌ عَلَيۡكُمۡ لَمۡ يَدۡخُلُوۡهَا وَهُمۡ يَطۡمَعُوۡنَ ﴿۴۶﴾

(7:46) And between the two there will be a barrier, and on the Heights will be men who will recognize each person by his mark and will cry, out to the people of Paradise: 'Peace be to you. 'These will be the ones who had not yet joined them in Paradise, though they long to do so. (34)

(34) The people of Araf (Heights) will be the people who are neither righteous enough to enter Paradise nor wicked enough to he cast into Hell. They will, therefore, dwell at a place situated between the two.

وَاِذَا صُرِفَتۡ اَبۡصَارُهُمۡ تِلۡقَآءَ اَصۡحٰبِ النَّارِ قَالُوۡا رَبَّنَا لَا تَجۡعَلۡنَا مَعَ الۡقَوۡمِ الظّٰلِمِيۡنَ ﴿۴۷﴾

(7:47) And when the eyes of the people of the Heights will be turned towards the people of Hell they will say: 'Our Lord! Do not cast us among the wrongdoing people.'

وَنَادٰۤى اَصۡحٰبُ الۡاَعۡرَافِ رِجَالًا يَّعۡرِفُوۡنَهُمۡ بِسِيۡمٰهُمۡ قَالُوۡا مَاۤ اَغۡنٰى عَنۡكُمۡ جَمۡعُكُمۡ وَمَا كُنۡتُمۡ تَسۡتَكۡبِرُوۡنَ ﴿۴۸﴾

(7:48) And the people of the Heights will cry out to the men whom they would recognize by their marks. saving: 'Neither your numbers nor the riches of which you were proud availed you.

اَهٰۤؤُلَآءِ الَّذِيۡنَ اَقۡسَمۡتُمۡ لَا يَنَالُهُمُ اللّٰهُ بِرَحۡمَةٍ ؕ اُدۡخُلُوا الۡجَنَّةَ لَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَلَاۤ اَنۡتُمۡ تَحۡزَنُوۡنَ ﴿۴۹﴾

(7:49) Are these not the ones of whom you swore that Allah shall grant them nothing of His mercy?' To such it will be said: 'Enter Paradise. You have no cause to fear, nor shall you grieve.'

وَ نَا ٰ ی ٰطَ ٰ ٰ ٰ

(7:52) Surely We have brought them a Book which We expounded with knowledge; [36] a guidance and a mercy to those who believe ' [37]

(36) The Qur'an has spelled out in some detail what constitutes the fundamental reality, explained the attitude that man ought to adopt, and laid down the fundamentals of the way of life that he ought to follow. The tails laid down in the Book in this regard are based on sound knowledge rather than on conjecture and fancy.

(37) The contents and teachings of the Book are perspicuous enough to show one the right way. Moreover, the life-style of those who believe in this Book also bears out, by the beneficial effects it produces on human life, how well it guides man. The blessings of the Qur'an become evident if man first notes the healthy changes that it brings about in his outlook, character and morals.

The above verse in fact alludes to the wonderful effect belief in the Quran had on the lives of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him).

هَلۡ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأۡوِيلَهُۥۚ يَوۡمَ يَأۡتِي تَأۡوِيلُهُۥ يَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِن قَبۡلُ قَدۡ جَآءَتۡ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ فَهَل لَّنَا مِن شُفَعَآءَ فَيَشۡفَعُواْ لَنَآ أَوۡ نُرَدُّ فَنَعۡمَلَ غَيۡرَ ٱلَّذِي كُنَّا نَعۡمَلُۚ قَدۡ خَسِرُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَضَلَّ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَفۡتَرُونَ ٥٣

(7:53) Are they waiting for the fulfilment of its warning? [38] On the Day that warning is fulfilled, those that have neglected it before will say: 'The Messengers of Our Lord did indeed bring forth the truth. Are there any intercessors who will now plead on our behalf? Or, can we be restored to life that we might perform differently from that which we did? ' [39] They surely ended in utter loss, and the lies they had fabricated failed them.

(38) The position of the people in question is as follows. The difference between good and evil was first explained to them, and yet they turned a deaf ear to it. Then some people established a good example by following the right path notwithstanding the dominant trend towards error. The wholesome effect of righteous

conduct became evident from the lives of such people, but it made no impression on the people concerned. Their persistence in error could only mean one thing: that they would only learn the lesson the hard way when they saw the painful effects of their error. Such people are like stupid patients who neither follow the directions of the physician, nor learn any lesson from their own observations of the many patients who have been cured of their diseases by following the directions of physicians. These people will realize - if they realize at all - on their death-bed that their ways were foolish and fatal.

(39) Such people will long to return to the world, pleading that they will believe in the truth which they had rejected since they have now witnessed it. They will also ensure that their attitude will be different from that which had been before. For a fuller discussion of this plea and the rejoinder to it see (al-Anam 6: 27-8); (Ibrahim 14: 44 and 45); (al-Sajdah 32: 12-13); (Al-Fatir 35: 37); (Al-Zumar 39: 56-9); and (Al-Mumin 40: 11-12).

اِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللّٰهُ الَّذِیۡ خَلَقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَ الۡاَرۡضَ فِیۡ سِتَّۃِ اَیَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسۡتَوٰی عَلَی الۡعَرۡشِ یُغۡشِی الَّیۡلَ النَّہَارَ یَطۡلُبُہٗ حَثِیۡثًا وَّ الشَّمۡسَ وَ الۡقَمَرَ وَ النُّجُوۡمَ مُسَخَّرٰتٍۭ بِاَمۡرِہٖ ؕ اَلَا لَہُ الۡخَلۡقُ وَ الۡاَمۡرُ ؕ تَبٰرَکَ اللّٰہُ رَبُّ الۡعٰلَمِیۡنَ ﴿۵۴﴾

(7:54) Surely your Lord is none other than Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, (40) and then ascended His Throne; (41) Who causes the night to cover the day and then the day swiftly pursues the night; Who created the sun and the moon and the stars making them all subservient to His command. Lo! His is the creation and His is the command. (42) Blessed is Allah, (43) the Lord of the universe.

(40) The word 'day' in the above verse has been used either in the usual sense of the twenty-four hour unit of time, or in a more general sense of 'period' of time such as in the following verses of the Qur'an:

Verily a Day in the sight of your Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning (Al-Hajj 22: 47).

The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him on a Day the

measure of which is fifty thousand years (Al-Ma'arij 70: 4). For further explanation see (Fussilat 41, nn. 12-15.)

(41) It is quite difficult to appreciate fully the exact nature of the Qur'anic statement: '(Allah) ascended the Throne.' One possibility is that after the creation of the universe God focused His effulgence at a particular point in His Kingdom which is known as the Throne, from where He showers the blessings of life and power, and governs the whole universe.

It is possible that the word 'Throne' stands for dominion and authority and that God's ascending the Throne signifies His actual taking over the reins of the universe after having created it. Whatever the exact meaning of the expression '(Allah) ascended the Throne', the main thrust of the verse is that God is not just the creator of the universe, but is also its sovereign and ruler; that after creating the universe He did not detach Himself from, nor become indifferent to, His creation. On the contrary, He effectively rules over the universe as a whole as well as every part of it. All power and sovereignty rest with Him. Everything in the universe is fully in His grip and is subservient to His will. Every atom is bound in obedience to Him. The fate of everything existent is in His Hands. Thus the Qur'an undermines the very basis of the misconception which leads man at times to polytheism, and at others to self-glorification and so to rebellion against God. This is the natural corollary of considering God divorced from the affairs of the universe. In such cases, there are two possibilities. One, that beings other than God are considered to have the power to make or mar man's destiny. Here, man is bound to turn to those beings in devotion and subservience. The second possibility is for man to consider himself as the master of his own destiny. Here, man considers himself independent of, and indifferent to, any higher being.

It is significant that the words and figures of speech employed by the Qur'an to denote the relationship between God and man are closely related to kingship, dominion, and sovereignty. This is too conspicuous a fact to be missed by any careful student of the Qur'an. It is strange, however, that it has

led some superficial critics and persons of biased outlook to conclude that the Qur'an reflects the milieu in which man's outlook was dominated by monarchical concepts, and that therefore its 'author', who in their view was the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), presented God as a sovereign ruler, an absolute monarch.

Quite contrary to this is the fundamental truth which the Qur'an emphatically affirms - God's sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. It negates, with equal emphasis, that sovereignty belongs to anyone else. Such a doctrine demolishes the very assumption on the basis of which the above erroneous conclusion was derived. The Qur'anic concept of God's sovereignty is in sharp contrast to the idea that creatures of God may lay claim to sovereignty and kingship. In contrast to the weak, mortal kings of the world, God is eternal and all-powerful This undermines the very basis of the misconceived criticism that Islam has a monarchical basis since no hunian being can conform to the Islamic description of the sovereign. All sovereignty vests in the One True God. Hence, all those who claim total or partial sovereignty either for any person or group of people are merely cherishing an illusion. It is evident, therefore, that it is totally inappropriate for man, who is a part of the universe created and governed by God, to adopt any other attitude than that of acknowledging God as the only object of worship and as the only sovereign in a societal and political sense.

(42) This is an elaboration of the idea propounded in the note immediately above explaining the meaning of God's ascension to the Throne. To reiterate, God is not merely the sole creator but also the only One Who commands and governs. He has not detached Himself from His creation, leaving it to the care of others who might rule over it as they please. Nor has He granted independence to His creation or any part of it so that they might function as they, wish. On the contrary, His grip over the entire universe is very firm. He rules over it according to His sovereign will. If we find alternation taking place between day and night, it is a result of God's command. God has full power both to hold that process in abeyance, or to alter the very system which causes the

alternation. The heavenly bodies - the sun, the moon, and the stars - are all absolutely powerless. They are totally subservient to God's overpowering will, and have been yoked to function according to His command.

(43) The word barakah signifies growth and increase. The notions of elevation and greatness as well as of permanence and stability are also an essential part of the word's meaning. Besides these the word inalienably carries nuances of goodness and beneficence. To say that God is full of barakah means that His goodness knows no bounds; that endless beneficence emanates from Him; that He is the Exalted One Whose loftiness knows no end; that His beneficence and loftiness are permanent, and thus they will never vanish or suffer decline. (For further elaboration see Tafhim al-Qaradn, (Al-Furqan 25: nn. 1 and 19.)

اُدۡعُوۡا رَبَّكُمۡ تَضَرُّعًا وَّخُفۡيَةً ؕ اِنَّهٗ لَا يُحِبُّ الۡمُعۡتَدِيۡنَ ۚ﴿۵۵﴾

(7:55) Call upon your Lord with humility and in secret. Surely He does not love transgressors.

وَلَا تُفۡسِدُوۡا فِى الۡاَرۡضِ بَعۡدَ اِصۡلَاحِهَا وَادۡعُوۡهُ خَوۡفًا وَّطَمَعًا ؕ اِنَّ رَحۡمَتَ اللّٰهِ قَرِيۡبٌ مِّنَ الۡمُحۡسِنِيۡنَ ﴿۵۶﴾

(7:56) And do not make mischief in the earth after it has been set in order, (44) and call upon Him with fear and longing. (45) Surely Allah's mercy is close to those who do good.

(44) The command not to make mischief in the earth means not to vitiate the right order of life. What basically, constitutes 'mischief-making' is to surrender oneself to one's lusts, to commit acts in subservience to other human beings and to subscribe to base morals, social orders, civilizations, principles and laws derived from sources other than God's Guidance. This is the essential mischief from which innumerable evils issue and which the Qur'an seeks to eradicate. The Qur'an also emphasizes that sound order is the original condition, and disorder and mischief occurred later as accidents resulting from man's ignorance and transgression. In other words, man's life on

earth did not start with ignorance, savagery, polytheistic beliefs, rebellion against God and moral disorder whereafter reforms were gradually introduced. On the contrary, man's life began with good order and was later corrupted because of man's perversity and folly. God sent Prophets from time to time in order to eradicate the disorder that had set in and to restore the original, good order. These Prophets constantly exhorted people to refrain from disrupting the original order and creating mischief.

Thus the Qur'anic view on this question is altogether different from that of the proponents of the false doctrine of evolution, who postulate that man has gradually come out of darkness into light; that life has advanced in a unilinear fashion, towards increasingly better conditions. The Qur'an rather postulates that human life began in the full light of Divine Guidance, that the original state of affairs was in accord with the Right Way prescribed by God. The blame for corruption goes to man who, failing victim to Satan's allurements, veered towards darkness and corrupted the right order of human life again and again. As for God, He continually sent Prophets in order to summon men from darkness to light, and to ask them to eschew evil and wickedness. (See Towards Understanding the Qur'an, (Al-Baqarah 2, n. 230, pp. 165-6 - Ed.)

(45) This clearly shows what the expression 'mischief-making' in the verse signifies. It consists of man's turning to others than God as his guardian, patron and helper, and calling them to his aid and support. To bring about reform, therefore, consists of man's turning exclusively to God as his guardian and helper.

'Calling upon Allah with fear and longing' conveys the idea that man should fear God alone, and to Him alone he should look for the fulfilment of his wishes. While calling upon God man should realize that he is totally dependent on God's favor and that he can attain success only if God helps and guides him to it. Similarly, man should also bear in mind that once he is deprived of God's support, he is doomed to utter failure and undoing.

وَهُوَ الَّذِیۡ یُرۡسِلُ الرِّیٰحَ بُشۡرًۢا بَیۡنَ یَدَیۡ رَحۡمَتِہٖ ؕ حَتّٰۤی اِذَاۤ اَقَلَّتۡ سَحَابًا ثِقَالًا سُقۡنٰہُ لِبَلَدٍ مَّیِّتٍ فَاَنۡزَلۡنَا بِہِ الۡمَآءَ فَاَخۡرَجۡنَا بِہٖ مِنۡ کُلِّ الثَّمَرٰتِ ؕ کَذٰلِکَ نُخۡرِجُ الۡمَوۡتٰی لَعَلَّکُمۡ تَذَکَّرُوۡنَ ۝۵۷

(7:57) And it is He Who sends forth winds as glad tidings in advance of His Mercy, and when they have carried a heavy-laden cloud We drive it to a dead land, then We send down rain from it and bring forth therewith fruits of every kind. In this manner do We raise the dead that you may take heed.

وَالۡبَلَدُ الطَّیِّبُ یَخۡرُجُ نَبَاتُہٗ بِاِذۡنِ رَبِّہٖ ۚ وَالَّذِیۡ خَبُثَ لَا یَخۡرُجُ اِلَّا نَکِدًا ؕ کَذٰلِکَ نُصَرِّفُ الۡاٰیٰتِ لِقَوۡمٍ یَّشۡکُرُوۡنَ ۝۵۸

(7:58) As for the good land, vegetation comes forth in abundance by the command of its Lord, whereas from the bad land, only poor vegetation comes forth. (46) Thus do We expound Our signs in diverse ways for a people who are grateful.

(46) It is necessary to grasp the subtle point made here in order to appreciate the full purport of what is being said. The reference to rain and its advantages is intended to bring into focus God's power, and to affirm life after death. Moreover, it is also intended to draw attention in allegorical, albeit graphic, terms to the blessings of prophethood, and how it helps men to distinguish between good and evil, between pure and impure. The intimation of Divine Guidance through the Prophets is compared to the movement of winds, the appearance of rain-laden clouds, and the fall of life-sustaining raindrops. In the same way as rainfall causes dead earth to be revived and makes the hidden treasures of life burst forth from its womb, so the impact of the teachings of the Prophets also brings dead humanity back to life, causing the hidden goodness in men to burst forth.

This allegory also hints at another important fact. In the same way that only fertile soil profits from rainfall, so only men of a righteous nature can profit from the blessings of prophethood. As for the wicked, they are like wasteland. Rainfall can cause such a land to bring forth only thorny bushes and cacti. Similarly, when

the wicked come into contact with the teaching of the Prophets, the hidden evils of their nature come into full play.

This allegory is followed by a well-sustained account with illustrations from history showing that whenever the Prophets preach their Message, men Split into two camps. The righteous receive the blessings of prophethood and flourish, bringing forth the fruit of their goodness. As for the wicked, once the criterion provided by the Prophets is applied their impurities are fully exposed. This enables human society to purge itself of impurities in the same way as the goldsmith purges precious metals of alloy.

لَقَدۡ اَرۡسَلۡنَا نُوۡحًا اِلٰى قَوۡمِهٖ فَقَالَ يٰقَوۡمِ اعۡبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَكُمۡ مِّنۡ اِلٰهٍ غَيۡرُهٗ ؕ اِنِّىۡۤ اَخَافُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيۡمٍ ۝٥٩

(7:59) Indeed We sent forth Noah to his people (47) and he said: '0 my people! Serve Allah, you have no other god than Him (48) Indeed I fear for you the chastisement of an awesome Day.'

(47) This historical narrative opens with an account of the Prophet Noah and his people. For the people of Noah were the first to drift away from the right way of life which was followed by the Prophet Adam and his descendants. God, therefore, sent Noah to guide and reform them.

In light of the Qur'anic allusions and Biblical statements it seems certain the people of Noah inhabited the land presently known as Iraq. This view is also supported by inscriptions of pre-Biblical times discovered in the course of archaeological excavations in Babylonia. Those inscriptions contain almost the same account which is recounted in the Qur'an and the Torah. The locale of the event is the vicinity of Mosul. Kurdish and Armenian traditions also corroborate this account insofar as they mention that it was in this area that Noah's Ark anchored. Some relies ascribed to Noah are still found in Jazirat Ibn 'Urnar, situated to the north of Mosul and on the frontiers of Armenia in the vicinity of the Ararat mountain mass. The inhabitants of Nakhichevan believe to this day that their town was founded by Noah.

Traditions similar to the story of Noah are also found in classical Greek Egyptian, Indian and Chinese literature. Moreover, stories of identical import have been popular since time immemorial in Burma, Malaya, the East Indies, Australia, New Guinea and various parts of Europe and America. This shows clearly that the event took place at some point in the dim past when men lived together in one region and it was after Noah's Flood that they dispersed to different parts of the world. This is why traditions of all nations mention the Flood of the early time. This is notwithstanding the fact that the actual event has increasingly been shrouded in mystery, and the authentic elements of the event overlaid with myth and legend.

(48) It is evident from the above verse and from other Qur'anic descriptions of the people of Noah that they were neither ignorant of, nor denied the existence of God, nor were they opposed to the idea of worshipping Him. Their real malady was polytheism. They had associated others with God in His godhead, and considered them akin to God in their claim that human beings should worship them as well. This basic error gave rise to a number of evils among them. There had arisen among them a class of people representing the false gods they themselves had contrived. Gradually this class of people virtually monopolized all religious, economic and political authority. This class also introduced a hierarchical structure of society which led to immense corruption and injustice. The moral degeneration which this system promoted sapped the roots of mankind's higher characteristics. When corruption reached a high peak, God sent Noah to improve the state of affairs. For long, Noah strove with patience and wisdom to bring about reform. All his efforts, however, were thwarted by the clergy which craftily kept people under its powerful hold. Eventually Noah prayed to God not to spare even a single unbeliever on the face of the earth, for they would go about misguiding human beings, and their progeny would likewise be wicked and ungrateful. (For a detailed discussion see(Hud 11: 25-48), (Al-Shuara 26: 105-22) and (Nuh 71: 1-28.)

قَالَ الۡمَلَاُ مِ نۡ قَوۡمِهٖۤ اِنَّا لَنَرٰىكَ فِىۡ ضَلٰلٍ مُّبِيۡنٍ ۝٦٠

(7:60) The leading men of his people replied: 'We see that you are in palpable error.'

قَالَ يٰقَوۡمِ لَيۡسَ بِىۡ ضَلٰلَةٌ وَّلٰكِنِّىۡ رَسُوۡلٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّ الۡعٰلَمِيۡنَ ۝٦١

(7:61) He said: '0 my people! There is no error in me, but I am a Messenger from the Lord of the universe.

اُبَلِّغُكُمۡ رِسٰلٰتِ رَبِّىۡ وَاَنَا لَكُمۡ نَاصِحٌ اَمِيۡنٌ ۝٦٢

(7:62) I convey to you the messages of my Lord, give you sincere advice, and I know from Allah that which you do not know.

اَوَعَجِبۡتُمۡ اَنۡ جَآءَكُمۡ ذِكۡرٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّكُمۡ عَلٰى رَجُلٍ مِّنۡكُمۡ لِيُنۡذِرَكُمۡ وَلِتَتَّقُوۡا وَلَعَلَّكُمۡ تُرۡحَمُوۡنَ ۝٦٣

(7:63) Do you wonder that admonition should come to you from your Lord through a man from amongst yourselves that he may warn you, that you may avoid evil and that mercy may be shown to you?' (49)

(49) There were striking similarities between Muhammad and Noah (peace be on them). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) received the same treatment from his people as did Noah from his. The message that each of them sought to preach was also the same. Likewise, the doubts and objections raised by the people of Muhammad (peace be on him) with regard to his prophethood were the same as those raised by Noah's people several thousand years ago. Again, what Muhammad (peace be on him) said in response to the doubts and objections raised against him were exactly the same as what Noah had said.

The Qur'anic narration of the stories of the Prophets makes it amply clear that the attitude of the nations to whom the Prophets were sent had always been the same as that of the Makkans towards the Message of Muhammad (peace be on him). Apart from this, the accounts of the various Prophets and their

people, display the same striking resemblances. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be on him) vindication of his teaching in response to the Makkans is identical with similar attempts by other Prophets to vindicate their teachings. So doing, the Qur'an seeks to emphasize that in the same way as the error and misguidance of which men become victims have remained essentially the same throughout the ages, the Message of God's Messengers has also been the same in all places and at all times. Again, there is a striking resemblance in the ultimate fate of all those peoples who reject the message of the Prophets and who persist in their erroneous and evil ways. This too has also been the same, namely utter destruction.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَاَنجَيۡنٰهُ وَ الَّذِيۡنَ مَعَهٗ فِى الۡفُلۡكِ وَ اَغۡرَقۡنَا الَّذِيۡنَ كَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا ؕ اِنَّهُمۡ كَانُوۡا قَوۡمًا عَمِيۡنَ ۚ ۶۴

(7:64) But they charged him with falsehood. Thereupon We delivered Noah and those who were with him in the Ark, and caused those who rejected Our signs as false to be drowned. (50) Surely they were a blind folk.

(50) An uninitiated reader of the Qur'an may, mistakenly conceive that the mission of each Prophet - to call his people to God - would have finished after the few attempts they made in that connection. Some people might even entertain a rather simplistic image of their mission. It might be thought that a Prophet would have suddenly risen and proclaimed to his people that he had been designated by God as a Prophet. This would have been followed by the raising of objections to that claim. Subsequently, the Prophet concerned would have explained the matter and might have removed their misgivings. The people would have stuck to their position, would have rejected the Prophet's claim and called him a liar. whereupon God must have visited that people with punishment.

The fact of the matter, however, is that the Qur'an has narrated in just a few lines a story that was worked out over a long period of time. The brevity of the Qur'anic description owes itself to the fact that the Qur'an is not interested per se in story-

telling; that its narration and purpose are didactic. Hence, while recounting a historical event, the Qur'an mentions only those fragments of the event which are relevant, ignoring those details which are irrelevant to Qur'anic purposes. Again, at different places in the Qur'an the same event is mentioned for a variety of reasons. On every occasion only those fragments of the story which are relevant to a specific purpose are mentioned and the rest are left out. An instance in point is the above narrative about Noah. In narrating Noah's story the Qur'an aims to point out the consequences attendant upon the rejection of the Prophet's Message. Since the total period spent on conveying the Message does not have any direct relationship with that purpose, the Qur'an altogether ignores it here. However, in passages where the Prophet and the Companions have been asked to remain patient, the long duration of the Prophet Noah's missionary, effort has been mentioned. This has been done precisely, with a view to raising the morale of the believers and to prevent them from feeling low because they did not see any, good results coming out of that struggle. By mentioning how Noah strove patiently for such a long period of time and in the face of discouraging circumstances is quite relevant in this context as it helps to teach the lesson which is intended. That lesson is to persist in serving the cause of the truth and to refuse to be daunted by the adversity of the circumstances. See (al-'Ankabut 29: 14).

It would be appropriate to remove, at this stage, a doubt which might agitate the minds of some people. For one frequently reads in the Qur'an accounts of nations which rejected their Prophets and charged them with lying. One also reads about the Prophets warning them of God's punishment, and then about its sudden advent, scourging the nation and totally destroying it. This gives rise to the question: Why do such catastrophic incidents not take place in our own time? Nations still rise and fall, but the phenomenon of their rise and fall is of a different nature. We do not see it happen that a nation is served with a warning, and is then totally destroyed by a calamity such as an earthquake. a flood, a storm, or a thunderbolt.

In order to understand this it should be remembered that a

nation which has directly received God's Message from a Prophet is treated by God in a different manner from nations which have not witnessed a Prophet. For if a nation directly witnesses a Prophet - an embodiment of righteousness - and receives God's Message from his tongue, it has no valid excuse left for rejecting that Message. And if it still rejects the Message, it indeed deserves to be summarily punished. Other nations are to be placed in a different category since they received God's Message indirectly. Hence, if the nations of the present time are not visited by; the devastating punishments which struck the nations of the Prophets in the past, one need not wonder since prophethood came to an end with the advent of Muhammad (peace be on him). One should indeed have cause to wonder if one saw the opposite happen - that is, if the nations of the present were visited by punishments from God which had afflicted those nations that rejected their Prophets face to face.

This does not mean, however, that God has ceased to inflict severe punishments on nations which turn away from God and are sunk in ideological and moral error. The fact is that God's punishments still afflict different nations of the world. These punishments are both minor and major. Minor punishments are aimed at warning those nations, and the major ones are of a much more serious character and cause considerable damage. However, in the absence of the Prophets who are wont to draw attention to moral degeneration as the basic cause of these calamities, the historians and thinkers of our time only scratch the surface and explain these in terms of physical laws or historical causes. These sophisticated explanations are of little help. On the contrary, nations so afflicted with heedlessness and moral stupor are thereby further prevented from appreciating that God has always warned evil-doing nations against following their evil ways, and that when they willfully disregard these warnings and adamantly stick to their erroneous ways. He ultimately inflicts disastrous punishments upon them.

وَ اِلٰی عَادٍ اَخَاهُم ۙ قَالَ یٰقَوۡمِ اعۡبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَکُمۡ مِّنۡ اِلٰهٍ غَیۡرُهٗ ؕ اَفَلَا تَتَّقُوۡنَ ﴿۶۵﴾

(7:65) And to 'Ad [51] We sent forth their brother Hud. He said: '0 my people! Serve Allah; you have no other god than Him. Will you, then, not avoid evil?'

(51) 'Ad, an ancient Arab people, were well-known throughout Arabia. They were known for their proverbial glory and grandeur. And when they were destroyed, their extinction also became proverbial. So much so that ttre word 'Ad has come to be used for things ancient and the word 'adiyat for archaeological remains. The land whose owner is unknown and which is lying fallow, from neglect is called 'adi al-ard.

The ancient Arabic poetry is replete with references to this people. Arab genealogists consider the 'Ad as the foremost among the extinct tribes of Arabia. Once a person of the Banel Dhuhl b. Shayban tribe, who was a resident of the 'Ad territory, called on the Prophet (peace be on him). He related stories to the Prophet about the people of 'Ad, stories handed down to the people of that region from generation to generation. (See Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 3, p. 482 - Ed.)

According to the Quran the people of 'Ad lived mainly in the Ahqaf region which is situated to the south-west of the Empty Quarter (al-Rub' al-Khali) and which lies between Hijaz, Yemen and Yamamah. It was from there that the people of 'Ad spread to the western coast of Yemen and established their hegemony in Oman, Hadramawt and Iraq. There is very little archaeological evidence about the 'Ad. Only a few ruins in South Arabia are ascribed to them. At a place in Hadramawt there is a grave which is considered to be that of the Prophet Hud. James R. Wellested, a British naval officer, discovered an ancient inscription in 1837 in a place called Hisn al-Ghurab which contains a reference to the Prophet Hud. The contents unmistakably bear out that it had been written by those who followed the Shariah of Hud. (For details see Tafheem al-Qur'an, (Al-Al. Ahqaf 46, n. 25.)

قَالَ الۡمَلَاُ الَّذِيۡنَ كَفَرُوۡا مِنۡ قَوۡمِهٖۤ اِنَّا لَنَرٰىكَ فِىۡ سَفَاهَةٍ وَّ اِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ مِنَ الۡكٰذِبِيۡنَ ۶۶

(7:66) The unbelievers among the leading men of his people said: 'Indeed we see you in folly, and consider you to be liars.'

قَالَ يٰقَوۡمِ لَيۡسَ بِىۡ سَفَاهَةٌ وَّلٰكِنِّىۡ رَسُوۡلٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّ الۡعٰلَمِيۡنَ ۝٦٧

(7:67) He said: '0 my people! There is no folly in me; rather I am a Messenger from the Lord of the universe.

اُبَلِّغُكُمۡ رِسٰلٰتِ رَبِّىۡ وَاَنَا لَكُمۡ نَاصِحٌ اَمِيۡنٌ ۝٦٨

(7:68) I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I give you sincere advice.

اَوَعَجِبۡتُمۡ اَنۡ جَآءَكُمۡ ذِكۡرٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّكُمۡ عَلٰى رَجُلٍ مِّنۡكُمۡ لِيُنۡذِرَكُمۡ ؕ وَاذۡكُرُوۡۤا اِذۡ جَعَلَكُمۡ خُلَفَآءَ مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِ قَوۡمِ نُوۡحٍ وَّزَادَكُمۡ فِى الۡخَلۡقِ بَصۡۜطَةً ۚ فَاذۡكُرُوۡۤا اٰلَآءَ اللّٰهِ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُوۡنَ ۝٦٩

(7:69) Do you wonder that an exhortation should come to you from your Lord through a man from amongst yourselves that he may warn you? And do call to mind when He made you successors after the people of Noah and amply increased you in stature. Remember then the wondrous bounties (52) of Allah, that you may prosper.'

(52) The word ala' used in the above verse stands for bounties, wondrous works of nature, and praiseworthy qualities. The purpose of the verse is to impress upon man to gratefully, recognize the favors God has lavished upon him, bearing in mind that God also has the Power to take them away.

قَالُوۡۤا اَجِئۡتَنَا لِنَعۡبُدَ اللّٰهَ وَحۡدَهٗ وَنَذَرَ مَا كَانَ يَعۡبُدُ اٰبَآؤُنَا ۚ فَاۡتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَاۤ اِنۡ كُنۡتَ مِنَ الصّٰدِقِيۡنَ ۝٧٠

(7:70) They said: 'Have you come to us that we should worship none other than Allah and forsake all whom our forefathers were wont to worship? (53) Then bring upon us the scourge with which you have threatened us if you are truthful?'

(53) It is worth noting that the people of 'Ad neither disbelieved in God nor refused to worship Him. They did not, however, follow, the teachings of Hud who proclaimed God alone should he worshipped, and that none other may be associated in servitude to Him.

قَالَ قَدۡ وَقَعَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ رِجۡسٞ وَغَضَبٌۖ أَتُجَٰدِلُونَنِي فِيٓ أَسۡمَآءٖ سَمَّيۡتُمُوهَآ أَنتُمۡ وَءَابَآؤُكُم مَّا نَزَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلۡطَٰنٖۚ فَٱنتَظِرُوٓاْ إِنِّي مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡمُنتَظِرِينَ ٧١

(7:71) Hud warned them: 'Surely punishment and wrath from your Lord have befallen upon you. Do you dispute with me about mere names that you and your forefathers have concocted (54) and for which Allah has sent down no sanction? (55) Wait, then, and I too am with you among those who wait.'

(54) They looked to gods of rain and gods of wind, wealth, and health. But none of these enjoys godhead. There are many instances in our own time of people whose beliefs are no different from the ones mentioned above. There are people who are wont to call someone Mushkil Kusha, 'the remover of distress' or to call someone else Ganjbakhsh, 'the bestower of treasures'. But God's creatures cannot remove the distresses of other creatures like themselves, nor do they have any treasure that they might give away to others. Their titles are merely empty words, bereft of the qualities attributed to them. All argumentation aimed at justifying those titles amounts to a lot of sound and fury about nothing.

(55) The Makkans could produce no sanction from Allah - Whom they themselves acknowledged as the Supreme God - that He had transferred to their false gods any of His power or authority. None has any authorization from God to remove distress from, or bestow treasures on, others. It is the Makkans themselves who arbitrarily chose to confer parts of God's power on those beings.

فَأَنجَيۡنَٰهُ وَٱلَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥ بِرَحۡمَةٖ مِّنَّا وَقَطَعۡنَا دَابِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَمَا كَانُواْ مُؤۡمِنِينَ ٧٢

(7:72) Then We delivered Hud and his companions by Our mercy, and We utterly cut off the last remnant of those who called the lie to Our signs and would not believe. (56)

(56) The Qur'an informs us that God brought about the total extermination of the 'Ad, a fact borne out by both Arabian historical traditions and recent archaeological discoveries. The 'Ad were so totally destroyed and their monuments so completely effaced that the Arab historians refer to them as one of the umam baidah (extinct peoples) of Arabia. The Arab tradition also affirms that the only people belonging to the 'Ad who survived were the followers of the Prophet Hud. These survivors are known as the Second 'Ad ('Ad Thaniyah). The Hisn al-Ghurib inscriptions referred to earlier (n. 51) above are among the remaining monuments of these people. One inscription, which is generally considered to date from the eighteenth century B.C., as deciphered by the experts, contains the following sentences:

We have lived for a long time in this fort in full glory, free of all want. Our canals were always full to the brim with water . . . Our rulers were kings who were far removed from evil ideas, who dealt sternly with mischief-makers and governed us according to the Law of Hud. Their edicts were recorded in a book. We believed in miracles and resurrection.

The above account fully corroborates the Qur'anic statement that it was only the companions of Hud who survived and inherited the glory and prosperity of the 'Ad.

وَ اِلٰى ثَمُوْدَ اَخَاهُمْ صٰلِحًا ۘ قَالَ يٰقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ اِلٰهٍ غَيْرُهٗ ؕ قَدْ جَآءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّنْ رَّبِّكُمْ ؕ هٰذِهٖ نَاقَةُ اللّٰهِ لَكُمْ اٰيَةً فَذَرُوْهَا تَاْكُلْ فِيْٓ اَرْضِ اللّٰهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوْهَا بِسُوْٓءٍ فَيَاْخُذَكُمْ عَذَابٌ اَلِيْمٌ ۝٧٣

(7:73) And to Thamud [57] We sent forth their brother. Salih. He said to them: '0 my people! Serve Allah, you have no other god than Him. Truly there has come to you a clear proof from your Lord. This she-camel from Allah is a Divine portent for you. [58] So leave her alone to pasture on Allah's earth, and touch her with no evil lest a painful chastisement should seize you.

(57) The Thamud are another ancient Arab people, next only to the 'Ad in fame. Legends relating to them were quite popular in pre-Islamic Arabia. In fact poetry and orations of the pre-Islamic (Jahiliyah) period abound with references to them. They are also mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions and in the Greek, Alexandrian and Roman works of history and geography. Some descendants of the Thamud survived to a little before the birth of Jesus. The Roman historians mention that they entered into the Roman army and fought against the Nabateans, their arch-enemy.

The Thamud lived in the north-western part of Arabia which is still called al-Hijr. In the present time there is a station on the Hijaz railway, between Madina and Tabuk. This is called Mada'in Salih, which was the capital town of Thamud and was then known as al-Hijr, the rock-hewn city. This has survived to this day and is spread over thousands of acres. It was once inhabited by no less than half a million people. At the time of the revelation of the Qur'an Arab trade caravans passed through the ruins of this city.

While the Prophet (peace be on him) was on his way, to Tabuk, he directed the Muslims to look upon these monuments and urged them to learn the lessons which sensible persons ought to learn from the ruins of a people that had been destroyed because of their evil-doing. The Prophet (peace be on him) also pointed to the well from which the she-camel of the Prophet Salih used to drink. He instructed the Muslims to draw water from that

well alone and to avoid all other wells. The mountain pass through which that she-camel came to drink was also indicated by the Prophet (peace be on him). The pass is still known as Fajj al-Naqah. The Prophet (peace be on him) then gathered all the Muslims who had been directed to look around that city of rocks, and addressed them. He drew their attention to the tragic end of the Thamud, who by their evil ways had invited God's punishment upon themselves. The Prophet (peace he on him) asked them to hastily move ahead for the place was a grim reminder of God's severe punishment and he hence called for reflection and repentance. (See Waqidi, Al-Maghazi, vol. 3, pp. 1006-8. See also the comments of Ibn Kathir on verses 73-8 - Ed.)

(58) The context seems to indicate that the clear proof referred to in the verse stands for the she-camel which is also spoken of as 'a Divine portent'. In (Al-Shuara 26: 154-8) it is explicitly mentioned that the Thamud themselves had asked the Prophet Salih to produce some sign which would support his claim to be God's Messenger. Responding to it, Salih pointed to the she-camel.

This illustrates clearly that the appearance of the she-camel was a miracle. Similar miracles had been performed earlier by other Prophets with a view to fulfilling the demand of the unbelievers and thus of vindicating their claim to prophethood. The miraculous appearance of the she-camel reinforces the fact that Salih had presented it as a 'Divine portent' and warned his people of dire consequences if they harmed it. He explained to them that the she-camel would graze freely in their fields; that on alternate days she and other animals would drink water from their well, They were also warned that if they harmed the she-camel they would be immediately seized by a terrible chastisement' from God.

Such statements could obviously only have been made about an animal which was known to be of a miraculous nature. The Thamud observed the she-camel graze freely in their fields and she and the other camels drank water on alternate days from their well. The Thamud, though unhappy with the situation, endured this for quite some time. Later, however, after prolonged

deliberations, they killed her. Such lengthy deliberations demonstrate that they were afraid to kill the she-camel. It is clear that the object of their fear was none other than the she-camel as they had no reason to be afraid of Salih, who had no power to terrify them. Their sense of awe for the she-camel explains why they let her graze freely on their land. The Qur'an, however, does not provide any detailed information as to what the she-camel looked like or how she was born. The authentic Hadith too provide no information about its miraculous birth. Hence, one need not take too seriously the statements of some of the commentators on the Qur'an about the mode of her birth. However, as far as the fact of her miraculous birth is concerned, that is borne out by the Quran itself.

وَاذْكُرُوٓا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَآءَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَّبَوَّأَكُمْ فِى الْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِهَا قُصُورًا وَّتَنْحِتُونَ الْجِبَالَ بُيُوتًا فَاذْكُرُوٓا ءَالَآءَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا فِى الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ٧٤

(7:74) And call to mind when He made you successors after 'Ad and gave you power in the earth so that you took for yourselves palaces in its plains and hewed out dwellings in the mountains. (59) Remember, then, the wondrous bounties of Allah and do not go about creating mischief in the land.' (60)

(59) The Thamud were highly skillful in rock-carving, and made huge mansions by carving the mountains, as we have mentioned earlier see (n. 57)above. In this regard the works of the Thamud resemble the rock-carvings in the Ajanta and Ellora caves in India and several other places. A few buildings erected by the Thamud are still intact in Madain Salih and speak of their tremendous skills in civil engineering and architecture.

(60) The Qur'an asks people to draw a lesson from the tragic end of the 'Ad. For just as God destroyed that wicked people and established Muslims in positions of power and influence previously occupied by them, He can also destroy the Muslims and replace them by Others if they should become wicked and mischievous. (For further elaboration see (n. 52)above.

قَالَ الۡمَلَاُ الَّذِيۡنَ اسۡتَكۡبَرُوۡا مِنۡ قَوۡمِهٖ لِلَّذِيۡنَ اسۡتُضۡعِفُوۡا لِمَنۡ اٰمَنَ مِنۡهُمۡ اَتَعۡلَمُوۡنَ اَنَّ صٰلِحًا مُّرۡسَلٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّهٖ ؕ قَالُوۡۤا اِنَّا بِمَاۤ اُرۡسِلَ بِهٖ مُؤۡمِنُوۡنَ ﴿۷۵﴾

(7:75) The haughty elders of his people said to those believers who had been oppressed: 'Do you know that Salih is one sent forth with a message from his Lord?' They, replied: 'Surely we believe in the message with which he has been sent.'

قَالَ الَّذِيۡنَ اسۡتَكۡبَرُوۡۤا اِنَّا بِالَّذِيۡۤ اٰمَنۡتُمۡ بِهٖ كٰفِرُوۡنَ ﴿۷۶﴾

(7:76) The haughty ones remarked. 'Most certainly we disbelieve in that which you believe.'

فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوۡا عَنۡ اَمۡرِ رَبِّهِمۡ وَقَالُوۡا يٰصٰلِحُ ائۡتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَاۤ اِنۡ كُنۡتَ مِنَ الۡمُرۡسَلِيۡنَ ﴿۷۷﴾

(7:77) Then they hamstrung the she-camel, [61] disdainfully disobeyed the commandment of their Lord, and said: '0 Salih! Bring upon us the scourge with which you threatened us if you are truly a Messenger [of Allah].'

(61) Although the she-camel was killed by an individual, as we learn also from Surahs al-Qamar (54) and Al-Shams (91), the whole nation was held guilty since it stood at the killer's back. Every sin which is committed with the approval and support of a nation, is a national crime even if it has been committed by one person. In fact the Qur'an goes a step further and declares that a sin which is committed publicly in the midst of a gathering is considered to be the collective sin of the people who tolerate it.

فَاَخَذَتۡهُمُ الرَّجۡفَةُ فَاَصۡبَحُوۡا فِىۡ دَارِهِمۡ جٰثِمِيۡنَ ﴿۷۸﴾

(7:78) Thereupon a shocking catastrophe seized them, [62] so that they lay prostrate in their dwellings.

(62) Other Qur'anic expressions used for the calamity are 'rajifah' (earthquake) (Al-Nazi'at 79: 6); 'sayah' (awesome cry) (Hud 11: 67); 'Saiqah' (thunderbolt) (Al-Baqarah 2: 55); and 'taghiyah'' (roaring noise) (Al-Haqqah 69: 5).

فَتَوَلّٰى عَنۡہُمۡ وَ قَالَ یٰقَوۡمِ لَقَدۡ اَبۡلَغۡتُکُمۡ رِسَالَۃَ رَبِّیۡ وَ نَصَحۡتُ لَکُمۡ وَ لٰکِنۡ لَّا تُحِبُّوۡنَ النّٰصِحِیۡنَ ۷۹

(7:79) And Salih left them, saying: 'O my people! I conveyed to you the message of my Lord and gave you good advice; but you have no liking for your well-wishers.'

وَ لُوۡطًا اِذۡ قَالَ لِقَوۡمِہٖۤ اَتَاۡتُوۡنَ الۡفَاحِشَۃَ مَا سَبَقَکُمۡ بِہَا مِنۡ اَحَدٍ مِّنَ الۡعٰلَمِیۡنَ ۸۰

(7:80) And remember when We sent Lot [as a Messenger to his people and he said to them: (63) 'Do you realize you practice an indecency of which no other people in the world were guilty of before you?

(63) The land inhabited by the people of Lot, which lies between Iraq and Palestine, is known as Trans-Jordan. According to the Bible, its capital town was Sodom, which is situated either somewhere near the Dead Sea, or presently lies submerged under it.. Apart from Sodom, according to the Talmud, there were four other major cities, and the land lying between these cities was dotted with such greenery and orchards that the whole area looked like one big garden enchanting any onlooker. However, the whole nation was destroyed and today we can find no trace of it. So much so that it is difficult to even locate the main cities which they inhabited. If anything remains as a reminder of this nation it is the Dead Sea which is also called the Sea of Lot. The Prophet Lot who was a nephew of the Prophet Abraham, accompanied his uncle as he moved away from Iraq. Lot sojourned to Syria, Palestine and Egypt for a while and gained practical experience of preaching his message. Later God bestowed prophethood upon him and assigned to him the mission of reforming his misguided people. The people of Sodom have been referred to as the people of Lot presumably because Lot may have established matrimonial ties with those people.

One of the many accusations recorded against Lot in the Bible - and the Bible has been tampered with extensively by the Jews - is that Lot migrated to Sodom after an argument with Abraham (Genesis 13: 10-12).

The Qur'an refutes this baseless charge and affirms that Lot was designated by God to work as His Messenger among his people.

The author refers to an argument between Abraham and Lot which he considers to be a fabrication of Jews. The obvious basis of this is that such an argument between the Prophets is inconceivable since it is unbecoming of them as Prophets. The basis of this inference is a statement in Genesis 13:1-12.

It seems that there has been some confusion with regard to this inference. The verses of Genesis in question make no reference to any strife between the two Prophets. The strife to which it refers allegedly took place between the two Prophets. In addition, when the two Prophets parted company it was on a pleasant note for Abraham had suggested that since there was an abundance of land, Lot should choose that part of the land he preferred so as to exclude all possibilities of strife between their herdsmen. (See Genesis 13:1-5-Ed.)

اِنَّكُم لَتَاْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهوَةً مِّن دُونِ النِّسَآءِ ؕ بَل اَنتُم قَومٌ مُّسرِفُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

(7:81) You approach men lustfully in place of women. You are a people who exceed all bounds.' (64)

(64) The Qur'an refers elsewhere to the many evil deeds of the people of Lot. Here the Qur'an confines itself to mentioning that most ignominious of crimes which invited God's scourge upon them.

The hideous act of sodomy, for which the people of Lot earned notoriety, has no doubt been committed by perverts in all times. The Greeks philosophers had the distinction of glorifying it as a moral virtue. It was left, however, for the modern West to vigorously propagate sodomy so much so that it was declared legal by the legislatures of a few countries. All this has been done in the face of the obvious fact that this form of sexual intercourse is patently unnatural. God created distinctions between the sexes

of all living beings for the purposes of reproduction and perpetuation of the species. As far as the human species is concerned, their creation into two sexes is related to another end as well: that the two should come together in order to bring into existence the family and establish human civilization. In view of this, not only were human beings divided into two sexes, but each sex was made attractive to the other. The physical structure and psychological make-up of each sex was shaped in keeping with the purpose of forging bonds of mutual cordiality between the members of the two sexes. The sexual act, which is intensely pleasurable is at once a factor leading to the fulfilment of nature's purposes as underlined by the sexual division of humankind as well as a reward for fulfilling these purposes.

Now, the crime of the person who commits sodomy in flagrant opposition to this scheme of things, is not limited to that act alone. In fact he commits along with it a number of other crimes. First, he wages war against his own nature, against his inherent psychological predilection. This causes a major disorder which leads to highly negative effects on the lives of both the parties involved in that unnatural act - effects which are physical, psychological as well as moral. Second, he acts dishonestly with nature since while he derives sexual pleasure he fails to fulfil the societal obligation of which this pleasure is a recompense. Third, such a person also acts dishonestly with human society. For, although he avails himself of the advantages offered by various social institutions, when he has an opportunity to act, he uses his abilities in a manner which not only fails to serve that society but which positively harms it. Apart from neglecting the obligations he owes to society, he renders himself incapable of serving the human race and his own family. He also produces effeminacy in at least one male and potentially pushes at least two females towards sexual corruption and moral depravity.

وَ مَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوۡمِهٖۤ اِلَّاۤ اَنۡ قَالُوۡۤا اَخۡرِجُوۡهُمۡ مِّنۡ قَرۡيَتِكُمۡ ۚ اِنَّهُمۡ اُنَاسٌ يَّتَطَهَّرُوۡنَ ﴿۸۲﴾

(7:82) Their only answer was: 'Banish them from your town. They are a people who pretend to be pure.' (65)

(65) It is evident from the present verse that the people of Lot Were not only shameless and corrupt, but were also a people who had sunk in moral depravity to such a degree that even the presence of a few righteous persons had become intolerable to them. Their moral degradation left them with no patience for anyone who sought to bring about any moral reform. Even the slightest element of purity found in their society was too much for them, and they simply wished to have their society purged of it.

When these people reached such a low point of wickedness and hostility to good, God decreed that they be wiped out altogether. When the collective life of a people becomes totally bereft of goodness and purity, it forfeits the right to exist on earth. Their example is like that of a basket of fruit. As long as some fruit remains firm, there is some justification to keep that basket. But the basket has to be thrown away when the fruit becomes rotten.

فَاَنۡجَيۡنٰهُ وَ اَهۡلَهٗۤ اِلَّا امۡرَاَتَهٗ ۫ كَانَتۡ مِنَ الۡغٰبِرِيۡنَ ﴿۸۳﴾

(7:83) Then We delivered Lot and his household save his wife who stayed behind, (66)

(66) As the Qur'an mentions elsewhere, Lot's wife supported her disbelieving relatives to the last. Hence, when God directed Lot and his followers to migrate from that corrupt land, He ordained that Lot's wife be left behind.

This seems to be an inference from(Al- Tahrim 66: 10 - Ed).

وَ اَمۡطَرۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ مَّطَرًا ؕ فَانۡظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الۡمُجۡرِمِيۡنَ ﴿۸۴﴾

(7:84) and We let loose a shower [of stones] upon them, (67) Observe, then, the end of the evil-doers. (68)

(67) The 'rainfall' in the verse does not refer to the descent of water from the sky. It refers rather to the volley of stones. The Qur'an itself mentions that their habitations were turned upside down and ruined. See (Verse 85); also (Hud 11:82-3); (Al-Hijr 15:74-E.)

(68) In light of this verse and other references in the Qur'an, sodomy is established as one of the deadliest sins; and that it incurred God's scourge on those who indulged in it. We also know from the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him) that the Islamic state should purge society of this crime and severely punish those guilty of it. There are several traditions from the Prophet (peace be on him) which mention that very severe punishments were inflicted on both partners of this act. According to one tradition, the Prophet (peace be on him) ordered that both partners be put to death. (See Ibn Majah, Kitab al-Hudud, 'Bab man 'amila 'Amal Qawm ut'- Ed.) In another tradition it has been added that the culprits should be put to death whether they are married or un-married. (Ibn Majah, Kitab al-Hudad - Ed.) In another tradition it has been said that both parties should be stoned (to death). (Ibn Majah, Kitab al-Hudad, 'Bab man 'amila 'Amal Qawm Lut ' - Ed.) However, since no case of sodomy was reported in the lifetime of the Prophet (peace be on him), the punishment did not acquire a very clear and definitive shape. Among the Companions, 'Ali is of the view that such sinners should be beheaded and instead of being buried should be cremated. Abu Bakr also held the same view. However, 'Umar and 'Uthman suggest that the sinners be made to stand under the roof of a dilapidated building, which should then be pulled down upon them. Ibn 'Abbas holds the view that those guilty of such a sinful act should be thrown from the top of the tallest building of the habitation and then pelted with stones. (See Al-Fiqh 'ala al-Madhahib al-Arba'ah, vol. 5, pp. 141-2 - Ed.) As for the jurists, Shafi pronounces the punishment of death on both partners to sodomy irrespective of their marital status, and of their role whether it be active or passive. According to Sha'bi, Zuhri, Malik and Ahmad b. Hanbal, they should be stoned to death. Sa'id b. al-Musayyib, 'Ata', Hasan Basri, Ibrahim Nakha'i, Sufyan Thawri and Awa'i believe that such sinners deserve the same punishment as laid down for unlawful sexual-intercourse: that unmarried ones should be lashed a hundred times and exiled, and that married ones should be stoned to death. Abu Hanifah, however, does not recommend any specific punishment. For him, the sinner should be awarded, depending on the circumstances of each case, some

deterrent punishment. According to one of the reports, the same was the view of Shafi'i. (See Ibn Qudamah, al-Mughni, vol. 8, pp. 187-8 - Ed.)

It should also be made clear that it is altogether unlawful for the husband to perpetrate this act on his wife. The Prophet (peace be on him), according to a tradition in Abu Da'ud, said: 'Cursed be he who commits this act with a woman.' (Abu Da'ud, Kitab al-Nikah, 'Bab fi Jami ' al Nikah' - Ed.) In other collections of Hadith such as Sunan of Ibn Majah and Musnad of Ahmad b. Hanbal. we find the following saying of the Prophet (peace be on him): 'God will not even look at him who commits this act of sodomy with his wife in her rectum.' (Ibn Majah, Kitab al-Nikah', 'Bab al-Nahy'an Ityan al-Nisa' fi Adbarihinn', Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 2, p. 344 - Ed.) Likewise the following saying of the Prophet (peace be on him) is mentioned in Tirmidhi: 'He who makes sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, or indulges in sodomy with a woman. or calls on a soothsayer, believing him to be true, denies the faith sent down to Muhammad (peace be on him).' (Ibn Majah, Kitab al-Taharah, 'Bab al-Nahy 'an ityan al-Ha'id'- Ed.)

وَ اِلٰی مَدۡیَنَ اَخَاہُمۡ شُعَیۡبًا ؕ قَالَ یٰقَوۡمِ اعۡبُدُوا اللّٰہَ مَا لَکُمۡ مِّنۡ اِلٰہٍ غَیۡرُہٗ ؕ قَدۡ جَآءَتۡکُمۡ بَیِّنَۃٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّکُمۡ فَاَوۡفُوا الۡکَیۡلَ وَ الۡمِیۡزَانَ وَ لَا تَبۡخَسُوا النَّاسَ اَشۡیَآءَہُمۡ وَ لَا تُفۡسِدُوۡا فِی الۡاَرۡضِ بَعۡدَ اِصۡلَاحِہَا ؕ ذٰلِکُمۡ خَیۡرٌ لَّکُمۡ اِنۡ کُنۡتُمۡ مُّؤۡمِنِیۡنَ ﴿۸۵﴾

(7:85) And to Midian [69] We sent forth their brother Shu'ayb He exhorted them: O my people! Serve Allah, you have no god but Him. Indeed a clear proof has come to you from your Lord. So give just weight and measure and diminish not to men their things ' [70] and make no mischief on the earth after it has been set in good order. [71] That is to your own good, if you truly believe . [72]

(69) The territory of Madyan (Midian) lay to the north-west of Hijaz and south of Palestine on the coast of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, and part of the territory stretched to the northern border of the Sinai Peninsula. The Midianites and their towns were situated at the crossroads of the trade routes from Yemen through Makka and Yanbu' to Syria along the Red Sea coast, and from Iraq to Egypt. Midian was, therefore, quite well known to the Arabs. In fact it persisted in their memory long after its

destruction for the Arab trade caravans enroute to Syria and Egypt passed through territories which were full of the ruins of their monuments.

Another point worth noting about the people of Midian is that they were reckoned to be descendants of Midyan, a son of the Prophet Abraharn born of his third wife, Qatura. According to a custom of the time, persons who attached themselves to a notable family were gradually counted as members of that family, as the descendants of that family's ancestor. It is for this reason that a large majority of Arabs were called the descendants of Ismai'l. Likewise those who embraced faith at the hands of Yaqab's sons bore the general name 'the People of Israel'. Now, since the inhabitants of Midian owed allegiance to Midyan, son of Abraham, they were referred to as the descendants of Midyan and their territory was called Midian.

In view of this it should not be thought that the Prophet Shu'ayb invited them, for the first time, to follow Divine Guidance. At the time of the advent of Shu'ayb their state was no different from that of the Israelites at the time of the advent of Moses. They too were originally a Muslim people who had subsequently moved far away from Islam. For six to seven centuries they lived amongst a people who were steeped in polytheism and moral corruption, and this led to their contamination with polytheism and moral corruption. Despite their deviation and corruption, however, they claimed to be the followers of the true faith, and were proud of their religious identification.

(70) This shows that the people of Midian suffered from two major ailments - polytheism and dishonesty in business. Shu'ayb devoted his efforts to purging them of those evils.

(71) The import of this statement has been explained earlier in (Notes 44-5) above. In his exhortations to his people, Shu'ayb emphasized that they should not allow the order of life, established by the previous Prophets on the foundations of true faith and sound morals, to be corrupted by false beliefs and moral depravity.

(72) This clearly shows that the people concerned claimed to be believers, as we have already pointed out. In fact, they were originally Muslims who had drifted away from Islam, who had become enmeshed in a range of evils. They not only professed to be believers, but took great pride in being so. See(n. 69) above - Ed. Shu'ayb made this fact the starting-point of his preaching. He told them that if they indeed were believers they should live up to that fact; they should consider their salvation to lie in practicing goodness and virtue, honesty and integrity; and they should distinguish between good and evil on the basis of the standards followed by righteous people rather than of those who believed neither in God nor in the Hereafter.

وَ لَا تَ قۡعُدُ ا بِكُلِّ صِرَاطٍ تُوۡعِدُوۡ نَ وَ تَصُدُّوۡ نَ عَ سَبِيۡلِ اللّٰ مَنۡ اٰمَنَ بِ وَ تَبۡ غُوۡنَهَا عِوَجًا
وَ ا ذۡكُرُوۡا اِذۡ كُ نۡتُمۡ قَلِ يۡ لًا فَكَثَّرَكُمۡ وَ ا ظُرُ ا كَ فَ كَانَ عَاقِبَ ا مُ سِدِ يۡنَ ﴿۸۶﴾

(7:86) And do not lie in ambush by every path [of life] seeking to overawe or to hinder from the path of Allah those who believe, nor seek to make the path crooked. Remember, how you were once few, and then He multiplied you, and keep in mind what was the end of mischief makers.

وَ اِنۡ كَانَ طَآئِفَ ةٌ مِّنۡكُ اٰمَنُ ا بِالَّذِ ۡ اُ سِلۡتُ بِ وَ طَآئِفَ ةٌ لَّمۡ يُؤۡمِنُ ا فَ ا بِرُوۡا حَتّٰى
يَحۡكُمَ اللّٰ بَ ۡنَنَا وَ هُوَ خَ ۡرُ الۡحٰكِمِ يۡنَ ﴿۸۷﴾

(7:87) And if there are some among you who believe in the message that I bear while some do not believe, have patience till Allah shall judge between us. He is the best of those who judge.'

قَالَ الۡمَلَاُ الَّذِ نَ اسۡتَكۡبَرُ ا مِ قَوۡمِ لَنُخۡرِجَنَّكَ يٰشُعَيۡبُ وَ الَّذِ نَ اٰمَنُ ا مَعَكَ مِ قَ ۡيَتِنَا
اَوۡ لَتَعُوۡدُ نَّ فِ مِلَّتِنَا ؕ قَالَ اَوَ لَوۡ كُنَّا كٰرِهِ يۡنَ ﴿۸۸﴾

(7:88) The haughty elders of his people said: 'O Shu'ayb! We shall certainly banish you and your companions-in-faith from our town, or else you shall return to our faith.' Shu'ayb said: 'What! Even though we abhor [your faith]?

قَدِ افۡتَرَيۡنَا عَلَى اللّٰهِ كَذِبًا اِنۡ عُدۡنَا فِىۡ مِلَّتِكُمۡ بَعۡدَ اِذۡ نَجّٰىنَا اللّٰهُ مِنۡهَا ؕ وَ مَا يَكُوۡنُ لَنَاۤ اَنۡ نَّعُوۡدَ فِيۡهَاۤ اِلَّاۤ اَنۡ يَّشَآءَ اللّٰهُ رَبُّنَا ؕ وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَىۡءٍ عِلۡمًا ؕ عَلَى اللّٰهِ تَوَكَّلۡنَا ؕ رَبَّنَا افۡتَحۡ بَيۡنَنَا وَ بَيۡنَ قَوۡمِنَا بِالۡحَقِّ وَ اَنۡتَ خَيۡرُ الۡفٰتِحِيۡنَ ۸۹

(7:89) If we return to your faith after Allah has delivered us from it we would be fabricating a lie against Allah. nor can we return to it again unless it be by, the will of Allah, our Lord. (73) Our Lord has knowledge of all things, and in Allah we put our trust. Our Lord! Judge rightly between us and our people, for You are the best of those who judge.'

(73) This phrase signifies substantively what is meant by the commonly used Islamic formula In-sha' Allah ('If Allah so wills'). Its meaning is evident from(Al-Kahf 18: 23-4), in which the believers are directed not to make definitive statements about what they will do without making such actions contingent on God's will. This is understandable since a believer firmly believes in God's power and is ever conscious that his destiny is inalienably tied to God's will. It is impossible for such a person to make foolish statements about what he will do and what he will not do. He is bound to make it clear that he will accomplish what he intends only, if 'God so wills'.

وَ قَالَ الۡمَلَاُ الَّذِيۡنَ كَفَرُوۡا مِنۡ قَوۡمِهٖ لَئِنِ اتَّبَعۡتُمۡ شُعَيۡبًا اِنَّكُمۡ اِذًا لَّخٰسِرُوۡنَ ۹۰

(7:90) The elders of his people who disbelieved said: 'Should you follow Shu'ayb, you will be utter losers. (74)

(74) One should not pass cursorily over this short sentence; instead one must reflect upon it. What the leaders of Midian in effect told their people was that Shu'ayb's exhortations to practice honesty and righteousness, and to strictly adhere to moral values, would spell their disaster. They implied that they could not succeed in the business carried on by the people of Midian if they were totally honest and straightforward in their dealings. Were they to let trading caravans pass by unmolested, they would lose all the advantages of being located at the crossroads of the major trade routes and by their proximity to the civilized and prosperous countries such as Egypt and Iraq. Also, if

they were to become peaceful and to cease their attacks upon the trade caravans, they would no longer be held in awe by neighboring countries.

Such attitudes have not, however, been confined to the tribal chiefs of Shu'ayb. People who stray away from truth, honesty and righteousness, regardless of their age and clime, have always found in honesty a means of great loss. People of warped mentalities in every age have always believed that trade, politics, and other worldly pursuits can never flourish unless they resort to dishonest and immoral practices. The main objection against the Message of truth in all ages has been that the pursuit of truth spells material doom.

فَاَخَذَتۡہُمُ الرَّجۡفَۃُ فَاَصۡبَحُوۡا فِیۡ دَارِہِمۡ جٰثِمِیۡنَ ﴿۹۱﴾

(7:91) Thereupon a shocking catastrophe seized them, and they remained prostrate in their dwellings.

الَّذِیۡنَ کَذَّبُوۡا شُعَیۡبًا کَاَنۡ لَّمۡ یَغۡنَوۡا فِیۡہَا ۚ اَلَّذِیۡنَ کَذَّبُوۡا شُعَیۡبًا کَانُوۡا ہُمُ الۡخٰسِرِیۡنَ ﴿۹۲﴾

(7:92) Those who had charged Shu'ayb with lying became as though-they had never lived there; it is they who became utter losers. (75)

(75) The destruction of the people of Midian remained proverbial in Arabia for a long time. As such the following lines in Psalms are significant:

Yea, they conspire with one accord; against thee they make a covenant - the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites. Moab and the Hagrites, Gebal and Ammon and Am'alek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined them; they are the strong arms of the children of Lot. Do to them as thou didst to Midian (Psalms 83: 5-9).

Note also the following statement in Isaiah :

A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the Lord of hosts: 'O my people, who dwell in Zion be not afraid of the Assyrians when they smite you with their rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did. For in a very little while my indignation will come to an end, and my anger will be directed to their destruction. And the Lord of hosts will wield against them a scourge, as when he smote Midian at the rock of Oreb . . .' (Isaiah 10: 21-6).

فَتَوَلّٰى عَنۡہُمۡ وَ قَالَ یٰقَوۡمِ لَقَدۡ اَبۡلَغۡتُکُمۡ رِسٰلٰتِ رَبِّیۡ وَ نَصَحۡتُ لَکُمۡ ۚ فَکَیۡفَ اٰسٰی عَلٰی قَوۡمٍ کٰفِرِیۡنَ ﴿۹۳﴾

(7:93) Shu'ayb then departed from his people, and said: '0 my people! Surely I conveyed to you the message of my Lord, and gave you sincere advice. How, then, can I mourn for a people who refuse to accept the truth?' (76)

(76) The stories narrated here have a definite didactic purpose and were narrated with a view to highlighting their relevance to the time of the Prophet (peace be on him). In each of these stories one of the parties is a Prophet who in respect of his teachings greatly resembles Muhammad (peace be on him), in summoning his people to the right way, in admonishing them, in sincerely seeking their welfare. At the other end of the scale in each narrative are the unbelieving nations who greatly resembled the Quraysh in the time of the Prophet (peace be on him) with regard to their disbelief and moral degeneration.

By recounting the tragic end of each of these unrighteous nations of the past, the Quraysh are reminded of the moral purpose of these stories. Through the stories they are told that if, because of their stubbornness they fail to follow the Messenger of God during the term of respite granted to them, they will be subjected to the same destruction which befell those past nations who persisted in wrong-doing and error.

وَ مَا ۬ اَ سَ نَا فِ ۪ قَ ۪ ةٍ مِّ نَّبِیٍّ اِلَّاۤ اَخَذ ۡنَاۤ اَ ۡلَ ا بِا بَا سَآءِ وَ الضَّرَّآءِ لَعَلَّ ۡ یَضَّرَّعُ ۡنَ ﴿۹۴﴾

(7:94) Never have We sent a Prophet to a place without trying its people with adversity and hardship that they may humble themselves.

ثُمَّ بَدَّلۡنَا مَکَانَ السَّیِّئَۃِ الۡحَسَنَۃَ حَتّٰی عَفَوۡا وَّ قَالُوۡا قَدۡ مَسَّ اٰبَآءَنَا الضَّرَّآءُ وَ السَّرَّآءُ فَاَخَذۡنٰہُمۡ بَغۡتَۃً وَّ ہُمۡ لَا یَشۡعُرُوۡنَ ﴿۹۵﴾

(7:95) Then We changed adversity into ease until they throve and said: 'Our forefathers had also seen both adversity and prosperity.' So We suddenly seized them without their even perceiving it. (77)

(77) After narrating individually the stories of how various nations responded to the Message of their Prophets, the Qur'an now spells out the general rule which has been operative throughout the ages. First, before the appearance of a Prophet in any nation, conditions that would conduce to the acceptance of his Message were created. This was usually done by subjecting the nations concerned to a variety of afflictions and punishments. They were made to suffer miseries such as famine, epidemics, colossal losses in trade and business, defeat in war. Such events usually have a healthy impact on people. They lead to a softening in their hearts. They generate humility and modesty. They enable people to shake off their pride and shatter their reliance on wealth and power and induce them to trust the One Who is all-powerful and fully controls their destiny. Above all, such events incline people to heed the words of warning and to turn to God in humility.

But if the people continue to refrain from embracing the truth they are subjected to another kind of test - that of affluence. This last test signals the beginning of their destruction. Rolling in abundant wealth and luxury, people are inclined to forget the hard times they have experienced. Their foolish leaders also inculcate in their minds an altogether preposterous concept of

history. They explain the rise and fall of nations and the alternation of prosperity and adversity among human beings by reference to blind natural forces, and in total disregard of moral values. Hence if a nation is seized by an affliction or scourge, such people see no reason why it should be explained in terms of moral failure. They are rather inclined to consider that a person's readiness to heed moral admonition or to turn humbly towards God, is a sign of psychological infirmity.

This foolish mentality has been portrayed all too well by the Prophet (peace be on him): 'A believer continually faces adversity until he comes out of it purified of his sins. As for the hypocrite, his likeness in adversity is that of a donkey who does not know why his master had tied him and why he later released him.' (Cited by Ibn Kathir in his comments on the verse - Ed.) Hence, when a people become so hard of heart that they neither turn to God in suffering, nor thank Him for His bounties in prosperity, they are liable to be destroyed at any moment.

It should be noted that the above rule which was applied to the nations of the previous Prophets, was also applied in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). When this surah was revealed the Quraysh displayed exactly the same characteristics and attitudes as those nations which had earlier been destroyed. According to a tradition narrated by both 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud and Abd Allah b. 'Abbas, as the Quraysh grew in defiance to the Prophet's call, he prayed to God that he might be assisted by inflicting famine on the Quraysh, as in the days of the Prophet Joseph. Accordingly, God subjected the Quraysh to such a severe famine that they took to subsisting on carcasses, the skins of animals, bones, and wool. Unnerved by this the Quraysh, led by Abu Sufyan, implored the Prophet (peace be on him) to pray to God on their behalf. But when the Prophets prayer helped to improve the situation somewhat, the Quraysh reverted to their arrogant and ignorant way's. (Bukhari, Kitab al-Taharah, Bab idha istashfa'a al-Mushrikun bi al-Muslim' - Ed.) The wicked ones among them tried to dissuade from God those who had derived some lesson from the famine. They argued that famines take place in course of operation of natural laws, that they are merely

a recurrent physical phenomenon. They emphasized that the occurrence of famine should not mislead people into believing in Muhammad (peace be on him). It was during this time that the surah under discussion was revealed. The above verses were thus quite relevant and it is against this backdrop that one appreciates their full significance. (For details see (Yunus 10: 21), (Al-Nahl 16: 112), (Al-Muminun 23: 75-6); and (Al-Dukhan 44: 9-16.)

وَ لَوۡ اَنَّ اَہۡلَ الۡقُرٰۤی اٰمَنُوۡا وَ اتَّقَوۡا لَفَتَحۡنَا عَلَیۡہِمۡ بَرَکٰتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَآءِ وَ الۡاَرۡضِ وَ لٰکِنۡ کَذَّبُوۡا فَاَخَذۡنٰہُمۡ بِمَا کَانُوۡا یَکۡسِبُوۡنَ ﴿۹۶﴾

(7:96) Had the people of those towns believed and been God-fearing, We would certainly have opened up to them blessings from the heavens and the earth; but they gave the lie [to their Prophets] and so We seized them for their deeds. so.

اَفَاَمِنَ اَہۡلُ الۡقُرٰۤی اَنۡ یَّاۡتِیَہُمۡ بَاۡسُنَا بَیَاتًا وَّ ہُمۡ نَآئِمُوۡنَ ﴿۹۷﴾

(7:97) Do the people of those towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come to them at night while they are asleep?

اَوَ اَمِنَ اَہۡلُ الۡقُرٰۤی اَنۡ یَّاۡتِیَہُمۡ بَاۡسُنَا ضُحًی وَّ ہُمۡ یَلۡعَبُوۡنَ ﴿۹۸﴾

(7:98) Or, do the people of those towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come to them by daylight while they are at play?

اَفَاَمِنُوۡا مَکۡرَ اللّٰہِ ۚ فَلَا یَاۡمَنُ مَکۡرَ اللّٰہِ اِلَّا الۡقَوۡمُ الۡخٰسِرُوۡنَ ﴿۹۹﴾

(7:99) Do they feel secure against the design of Allah [78] None can feel secure against the design of Allah except the utter losers.

(78) The expression makr signifies a secret strategy of which the victim has no inkling until the decisive blow is struck. Until then, the victim is under the illusion that everything is in good order.

اَوَ لَمۡ يَهۡدِ لِلَّذِيۡنَ يَرِثُوۡنَ الۡاَرۡضَ مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِ اَهۡلِهَاۤ اَنۡ لَّوۡ نَشَآءُ اَصَبۡنٰهُمۡ بِذُنُوۡبِهِمۡ وَنَطۡبَعُ عَلٰى قُلُوۡبِهِمۡ فَهُمۡ لَا يَسۡمَعُوۡنَ ﴿۱۰۰﴾

(7:100) Has it not, then, become plain to those who have inherited the earth in the wake of the former generations that, had We so willed, We could have afflicted them for their sins, (79) (they, however, are heedless to basic facts and so) We seal their hearts so that they hear nothing. (80)

(79) Every nation which rises in place of one that falls, can perceive the misdeeds which brought about the preceding nation's fall. Were such a people to make use of their reason, to appreciate the false ideas and misdeeds which led to the undoing of those who once strutted abroad in vainglory, they would have realized that the Supreme Being Who had once punished them for their misdeeds and deprived them of power and glory had not ceased to exist. Nor has that Supreme Being been deprived of the power to inflict a punishment on the people of the present times, a power with which He smote the nations of the past. Nor has God become bereft of the capacity to dislodge the wicked nations of today in the manner He did in the past.

(80) Those people who derive no lesson from history, who thoughtlessly pass over the ruins of the past, remaining engrossed in heedlessness, are deprived by God of the capacity to think correctly and to pay due attention to the counsel of well-wishers. Such is the God-made law of nature that if someone closes his eyes, not even a single ray of sun-light will reach his sight. Similarly, if someone is bent upon closing his ears none can make him hear even a word.

تِلۡكَ الۡقُرٰى نَقُصُّ عَلَيۡكَ مِنۡ اَنۡۢبَآئِهَا ۚ وَ لَقَدۡ جَآءَتۡهُمۡ رُسُلُهُمۡ بِالۡبَيِّنٰتِ فَمَا كَانُوۡا لِيُؤۡمِنُوۡا بِمَا كَذَّبُوۡا مِنۡ قَبۡلُ ؕ كَذٰلِكَ يَطۡبَعُ اللّٰهُ عَلٰى قُلُوۡبِ الۡكٰفِرِيۡنَ ﴿۱۰۱﴾

(7:101) To those [earlier] communities - some of whose stories We relate to you - there had indeed come Messengers with clear proofs, but they would not believe what they had once rejected as false. Thus it is that Allah seals the hearts of those who deny the truth. (81)

(81) The purpose behind the 'sealing of hearts' mentioned in the preceding verse is also explained in the present verse. It is clear from the two verses that the 'sealing of hearts' means that man's capacity to hear and understand the truth is seriously, impaired because of the operation of natural, psychological laws. Because of these laws, once a person turns away from the truth because of his irrational prejudices and the dominance of lust, he becomes enmeshed in his own obstinacy and adamance. With the passage of time this adamance is compounded to such an extent that despite all rational and empirical evidence in support of the truth, he continues to reject it.

وَ مَا وَجَدۡنَا لِاَكۡثَرِهِمۡ مِّنۡ عَهۡدٍ ۚ وَ اِنۡ وَّجَدۡنَاۤ اَكۡثَرَهُمۡ لَفٰسِقِيۡنَ ﴿۱۰۲﴾

(7:102) We did not find most of them true to their covenants; indeed We found most of them to be transgressors. (82)

(82) The statement that 'We did not find most of them true to their covenants' signifies the general propensity of people not to honor their commitments. They are neither faithful to the primordial covenant which they made with God see (Al-Araf 7: 172) which is binding on every mortal as God's servant and creature, nor faithful to the collective covenant which is binding on every human being as a member of the human fraternity. Nor are men generally faithful to the commitments which they make to God in hours of distress or in moments when their moral instincts are awake and astir. Violation of any of these covenants has been termed fisq (transgression).

ثُمَّ بَعَثۡنَا مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ مُّوۡسٰى بِاٰيٰتِنَاۤ اِلٰى فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَ مَلَا۟ئِهٖ فَظَلَمُوۡا بِهَا ۚ فَانۡظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الۡمُفۡسِدِيۡنَ ﴿۱۰۳﴾

(7:103) After those We sent forth Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his nobles, (83) but they dealt with Our signs unjustly. (84) Observe, then, what happened to the mischief-makers.

(83) The stories narrated in the Qur'an bring home unmistakenly the point that people who reject God's Message are not spared; rather they are destroyed. In narrating at length the story of Moses, Pharaoh and the Israelites, the Qur'an provides some important lessons for the unbelieving Quraysh, the Jews, and also the believers.

The Quraysh are advised that the apparently large differences in the numerical strength of the forces of truth and falsehood in the early phase of the Islamic movement should not lead them to entertain any, kind of illusion. History, provides ample testimony that the Message of truth has always had a very humble beginning. That its proponent, initially, is in the hopelessly small minority of one; in fact, one in the whole world. He then proceeds, despite his resource lessness, to challenge the hegemony of falsehood, to declare war against it, despite the fact that falsehood is backed by powerful states and empires. And ultimately the truth triumphs. The Quraysh are also reminded that all conspiracies hatched against the Prophets and all the means employed to suppress the Message of truth are ultimately foiled. They are further told that God grants long terms of respite to the evil-doing nations so that they might mend their ways and reform themselves. But when they persistently disregard all warnings and learn no lesson from instructive events, He smites them with an exemplary punishment.

Some further lessons are meant to be conveyed to those who believed in the Prophet (peace be on him). First, that they should not feel disheartened by the paucity of resources, nor be overawed by the impressive numerical strength, pomp and grandeur of their enemies. Nor should they lose heart if they find that God's help does not come at the expected hour. Second, that those who follow in the footsteps of the Jews are bound, ultimately, to be seized by the same curse which afflicted the Jews.

As for the Israelites, they are warned against the evil effects of clinging to falsehood. Illustrations of this were provided by important events in their own history. They are also asked to

purge the Message of the earlier Prophets of all accretions and distortions and to restore it to its original purity.

(84) 'They dealt with Our signs unjustly' refers to their rejection of God's signs and to the fact that they dismissed them as sheer sorcery. If a person scoffs at a beautiful couplet, and dubs it as amateurish rhyming, this amounts to committing an offence against poetry itself. Likewise, to brand those extraordinary acts of God as sorcery and magic - even though magicians declared that those acts were beyond their ability - constitutes a serious offence not only against God's signs but also against common sense and truth.

وَ قَالَ مُوسٰى يٰفِرۡعَوۡنُ اِنِّىۡ رَسُوۡلٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّ الۡعٰلَمِيۡنَ ۙ﴿۱۰۴﴾

(7:104) And Moses said: '0 Pharaoh! (85) I am a Messenger from the Lord of the universe.

(85) 'Pharaoh' literally means 'the offspring of the sun-god'. The ancient Egyptians called the sun 'Ra', worshipped it as their supreme deity', and Pharaoh - Ra's physical manifestation and representative - was named after it. It was for this reason that all Egyptian rulers claimed their authority on the basis of their association with Ra, and every ruler who mounted the Egyptian throne called himself Pharaoh, trying thereby to assure his people that he was their supreme deity.

It may be noted that the Qur'anic narrative regarding Moses refers to two Pharaohs. The first of these was one during whose reign Moses was born and in whose palace he was brought up. The second Pharaoh to Whom reference is made is the one whom Moses invited to Islam and who was asked to liberate the Israelites. It is this latter Pharaoh who was finally drowned. Modern scholarship is inclined to the view that the first Pharaoh was Rameses 11 who ruled over Egypt from 1292 B.C. to 1225 B.C. while the second Pharaoh was Minpetah, his son, who had become a co-sharer in his father's authority during the latter's lifetime and who, after his death, became the fully-fledged ruler of Egypt. This, however, is not fully established since Moses,

according to the Egyptian calendar, died in 1272 B.C. In any case these are merely historical conjectures. It is quite difficult to establish a clear chronological framework owing to discrepancies in the Egyptian, Israeli and Christian calendars.

حَقِيقٌ عَلٰٓى اَنْ لَّآ اَقُوْلَ عَلَى اللّٰهِ اِلَّا الْحَقَّ ۭ قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِبَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْ رَّبِّكُمْ فَاَرْسِلْ مَعِيَ بَنِيْٓ اِسْرَاۗءِيْلَ ١٠٥

(7:105) And it behooves me to say nothing about Allah except what is true. I have come to you with a clear sign of having been sent from your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with me.' (86)

(86) Moses was sent to Pharaoh to invite him to two things; first, to surrender himself to God (i.e. Islam); and second, to release the Israelites - who were already Muslims - from his oppressive bondage. The Qur'an refers occasionally to both these objectives, and occasionally confines itself to mentioning either of the two.

قَالَ اِنْ كُنْتَ جِئْتَ بِاٰيَةٍ فَاْتِ بِهَآ اِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصّٰدِقِيْنَ ١٠٦

(7:106) Pharaoh said: if you have brought a sign, then bring it forth if you are truthful.'

فَاَلْقٰى عَصَاهُ فَاِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِيْنٌ ١٠٧

(7:107) Thereupon Moses threw his rod, and suddenly it was a veritable serpent.

وَّنَزَعَ يَدَهٗ فَاِذَا هِيَ بَيْضَاۗءُ لِلنّٰظِرِيْنَ ١٠٨

(7:108) Then he drew out his hand, and it appeared luminous to all beholders. (87)

(87) Moses was granted these two miraculous signs in order to provide testimony to his being a Messenger of God, the creator and sovereign of the universe. As we have mentioned earlier, whenever the Prophets introduced themselves as God's Message-

bearers, people asked them to produce some miraculous sign, to perform something supernatural. In response to those demands the Prophets produced what the Qur'an terms as 'signs', and which are called 'miracles' by theologians.

Those who tend to play down the supernatural character of such signs or miracles, and who try to explain them in terms of natural laws of causation, in fact attempt to build a mid-way house between believing and disbelieving in the statements of the Qur'an. Such an approach can hardly be considered reasonable. What it does demonstrate, however, is how such people can be pulled in two opposite directions. On the one hand, they are not inclined to believe in a Book which abounds in narrations of a supernatural kind. On the other hand, being born followers of their ancestral religion, they are not inclined to reject the Book which carries supernatural narrations.

With regard to miracles, there are two basic questions that people should ask themselves. Did God, after creating the universe and establishing a system of natural causations therein, suspend Himself such that it is no longer possible for Him to interfere in the workings of the universe? Or does He still hold the reins to His realm in His owns Hands so that His command is enforced every moment, and He does retain the power to alter the shape of things and the normal course of events - either partially or fully, - as and when He wills?

It is impossible for those who respond in the affirmative to the first question to accept the idea of miracles. For clearly miracles do not fit in with their concept of God and the universe. Honesty demands that instead of indulging in far-fetched explanations of Qur'anic statements on miracles, such people should clearly declare that they do not believe in the Qur'an. For quite obviously the Qur'an is explicit, even quite emphatic in affirming the former concept of God.

As for those who, being convinced by Qur'anic arguments, respond in the affirmative to the second question regarding God and the universe, for them there is no difficulty in accepting

miracles. Let us take the instance mentioned in verse 107, namely, that the rod of Moses turned into a serpent. Now, there are those who believe that serpents can come into being only through one process - the known biological process. Such people are bound to reject the statement that Moses' rod changed into a serpent and later reverted to its original shape. On the contrary, if you are fully convinced that it is God's command alone which causes life to arise from lifeless matter, and that God has full power to confer whichever kind of life He wills, the transformation of the rod into a serpent and its subsequent reversion to its original state is no stranger than the transformation of any other lifeless matter into a living entity. The fact that the latter happens virtually every day whereas the former took place only a few times in history is not enough to declare the first as incredibly, strange and the second as 'natural'.

قَالَ ا لۡمَلَاُ مِ ۡ رۡقَ مِ ۡ فِ ۡ عَوۡنَ اِنَّ هٰذَا لَسٰحِرٌ عَلِيۡمٌ ۱۰۹

(7:109) The elders of Pharaoh's people said: 'Surely this man is a skillful magician

يُّرِيدُ أَن يُخۡرِجَكُم مِّنۡ أَرۡضِكُمۡ فَمَاذَا تَأۡمُرُونَ ١١٠

(7:110) who seeks to drive you out from your land.
(88) What would you have us do?'

(88) The above account raises the question as to how a destitute member of the slave Israeli nation could pose such a serious threat to an emperor as mighty as Pharaoh. This is especially so when one considers that Pharaoh was not only an absolute ruler over territory which stretched in one direction from Syria to Libya and in the other from the Mediterranean coast to Ethiopia, but was even considered a deity deserving of worship,

One might also wonder how the transformation of Moses' rod into a serpent could he considered an event of such magnitude as to give rise to the fear that Moses would overthrow the entrenched empire and unseat the royal family as well as the entire ruling class. It might further seem strange that the mere declaration of prophethood and the demand to liberate the people of Israel caused such a furor even though no other political question had been touched upon.

The answer here lies in the fact that Moses' claim to prophethood implied the call to total change, obviously, including political change. For if a person lays claim to be God's Messenger, it implies that people obey him unreservedly. For God's Messengers are not sent to the world to obey other human beings and live in subordination to them; they rather ask others to accept them as their leaders and rulers. It is this which explains why Pharaoh and his coterie felt threatened by an all-out revolution - political, economic and social - when Moses came forth with his call.

There remains the question as to why the claim to prophethood was considered such a potential threat when Moses enjoyed the support of none except his brother, Aaron, and his claim was reinforced by only two miracles - those of the shining hand and the rod which turned into a serpent. This can be explained by two things. First, that Pharaoh and his courtiers

knew very well about Moses. All were aware of his extraordinary abilities and his inherent caliber as a leader of men. Also, according to the traditions of the Talmud and Josephus - provided they are authentic -Moses had also learnt the martial arts and other skills which were available only exclusively to royalty and which were required in connection with their political and military leadership. Moreover, he had proved his mettle as a good general during the expedition to Ethiopia. Furthermore, during the course of his eight years of life in Midian - rigorous years in the desert working as a shepherd - he had purged himself of all his weaknesses because of his association with the Pharaonic system. Hence. when the Pharaonic court was confronted by a mature, serene and pious man who came forth with the claim of prophethood, it was obviously impossible for them to give short shrift to his claim. Second, the miracles of the rod and the shining hand overawed Pharaoh and his courtiers to such an extent they were almost convinced that Moses did indeed enjoy the support of some supernatural power. That they were unnerved by the very first proof of his prophethood is borne out by the contradictions in their charges against Moses. On the one hand they dubbed Moses a sorcerer, and on the other hand they accused him of plotting to banish them from their own land. It is clear that had they taken Moses for a mere sorcerer, they would not have expressed fears of political upheaval. For sorcery has never brought about any political change in the world.

قَالُوٓا۟ اَرۡجِهۡ وَ اَخَاهُ وَ اَرۡسِلۡ فِی الۡمَدَآئِنِ حٰشِرِیۡنَ ۙ﴿۱۱۱﴾

(7:111) Then they advised Pharaoh: 'Put off Moses and his brother for a while, and send forth heralds to your cities

يَ ا۬ٓ كَ بِكُلِّ سٰحِرٍ عَلِيمٍ ١١٢

(7:112) to summon every skillful magician to your presence.' (89)

(89) The plan of Pharaoh's courtiers clearly suggests that they knew the difference between mere sorcery and a miracle. They were well aware that miracles are effective and have the capacity to bring about actual transformation whereas sorcery results merely in optic illusion. Hence, they dubbed Moses a sorcerer so as to refute his claim to prophethood. They claimed instead that the transformation of the rod into a serpent was not a miracle; that it was rather a magical performance which could be undertaken by any sorcerer. Therefore, they asked all the sorcerers of the land to come together and display how rods could be magically transformed into serpents. They believed that such a magical show would remove the awesome effect created by Moses' miracles on the people, or at least sow doubts in their minds about those miracles.

وَ جَآءَ السَّحَرَ ۬ۖ فِ ۬ رِ ۬ عَ نَ قَالُ ٓ ا اِنَّ لَنَا لَاَ ۬ جْ ۬ رًا اِ كُنَّا نَ ۬ نْ ۬ غٰلِبِينَ ١١٣

(7:113) And the magicians came to Pharaoh and said: 'Shall we have a reward if we win?'

قَالَ نَعَ ۬ مْ ۬ وَ اِنَّكُمْ لَمِنَ ۬ مُقَرَّبِينَ ١١٤

(7:114) Pharaoh replied: 'Certainly, and you shall be among those who are near to me.'

قَالُ ٓ ا يٰمُوسٰ ۬ى اِمَّ ۬ آ اَنْ تُ ۬ قِيَ وَ اِمَّ ۬ آ اَنْ نَ ۬ كُ ۬ وْ نَ نَ ۬ نْ ۬ نُ ۬ ٱلْ ۬ قِينَ ١١٥

(7:115) Then they said: '0 Moses, will you [first] throw your rod, or shall we throw?'

قَالَ اَ ۬ لْ ۬ قُ ٓ ا فَلَمَّ ۬ آ اَ ۬ لْ ۬ قَ ٓ ا سَحَرُ ٓ ا اَ ۬ عْ يُنَ النَّاسِ وَ ۬ سْ ۬ تَرْ ۬ هَبُ ۬ وْ هُ ۬ مْ وَ جَآءُ ۬ وْ بِسِحْرٍ عَظِيمٍ ١١٦

(7:116) Moses said: 'You throw.' So when they threw [their rods], they enchanted the eyes of the people, and struck them with awe, and produced a mighty sorcery.

وَ لَمَّا جَآءَ اِلٰی مُوسٰی اَلۡقِ عَصَاکَ فَاِذَا ہِیَ تَلۡقَفُ مَا یَاۡفِکُوۡنَ ۱۱۷

(7:117) Then We directed Moses: 'Now you throw your rod.' And lo! it swallowed up all their false devices. (90)

(90) It would be a mistake to believe that the rod of Moses swallowed up the rods and ropes cast by the other sorcerers and which had looked like serpents. The Quranic statement means that the rod of Moses swallowed up the falsehood faked by them. This clearly shows that wherever Moses' rod moved, it destroyed the magical effect which had caused the transformation of their ropes and rods. One blow of Moses' rod caused every other rod to revert to a rod, and every rope to revert to a rope. (For further elaboration see Tafheem al-Quran, (Ta Ha 20, n. 42)

فَوَقَعَ الۡحَقُّ وَ بَطَلَ مَا کَانُوۡا یَعۡمَلُوۡنَ ۱۱۸

(7:118) Thus was the truth established, and their doings proved in vain.

فَغُلِبُوۡا ہُنَالِکَ وَ انۡقَلَبُوۡا صٰغِرِیۡنَ ۱۱۹

(7:119) Pharaoh and his men were defeated and put to shame,

وَ اُلۡقِیَ السَّحَرَۃُ سٰجِدِیۡنَ ۱۲۰

(7:120) and the magicians flung themselves prostrate

قَالُوۡۤا اٰمَنَّا بِرَبِّ الۡعٰلَمِیۡنَ ۱۲۱

(7:121) saying: 'We believe in the Lord of the universe,

رَبِّ مُوۡسٰی وَ ہٰرُوۡنَ ۱۲۲

(7:122) the Lord of Moses and Aaron.' (91)

(91) Thus God turned the tables on Pharaoh and his courtiers they arranged the magic show in the hope that it would convince the people that Moses was just a sorcerer, and thus make them skeptical about his claim to prophethood. But the actual outcome was quite the opposite. The sorcerers who had been assembled were defeated. Not only that, it was also unanimously acknowledged that the signs displayed by Moses in support of his claim were not feats of magic. Rather, his signs rather manifested the might of God, the Lord of the universe, and hence could not be overcome by magic.

قَالَ فِرۡعَوۡنُ اٰمَنتُم بِهٖ قَبۡلَ اَنۡ اٰذَنَ لَكُمۡ ؕ اِنَّ هٰذَا لَمَكۡرٌ مَّكَرۡتُمُوۡهُ فِى الۡمَدِيۡنَةِ لِتُخۡرِجُوۡا مِنۡهَا اَهۡلَهَا ۚ فَسَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُوۡنَ ۱۲۳

(7:123) Pharaoh said: 'What! Do you believe before you have my permission? Surely this is a plot you have contrived to drive out the rulers from the capital. So you shall see,

لَاُقَطِّعَنَّ اَ يۡدِيَكُمۡ وَاَرۡجُلَكُمۡ مِّنۡ خِلَافٍ ثُمَّ لَاُصَلِّبَنَّكُمۡ اَجۡمَعِيۡنَ ﴿۱۲۴﴾

(7:124) I shall cut off your hands and feet on the opposite sides, and then crucify you all.'

قَالُوۡۤا اِنَّاۤ اِلٰى رَبِّنَا مُنۡقَلِبُوۡنَ ﴿۱۲۵﴾

(7:125) They replied: 'We shall surely return to our Lord.

وَمَا تَنۡقِمُ مِنَّاۤ اِلَّاۤ اَنۡ اٰمَنَّا بِاٰيٰتِ رَبِّنَا لَمَّا جَآءَتۡنَا ؕ رَبَّنَاۤ اَفۡرِغۡ عَلَيۡنَا صَبۡرًا وَّتَوَفَّنَا مُسۡلِمِيۡنَ ﴿۱۲۶﴾

(7:126) Will you punish us just because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us? Our Lord! Shower us with perseverance and cause us to die as those who have submitted [to You].' (92)

(92) Faced with utter failure Pharaoh finally resorted to branding the whole magic tournament as a conspiracy concocted by Moses and his accomplice sorcerers. Under threat of death and physical torture he asked the sorcerers to confess that they had acted in collusion with Moses. This last move by Pharaoh was ineffectual. For the sorcerers readily agreed to endure every torture, clearly proving thereby that their decision to accept Moses' message reflected their sincere conviction and that no conspiracy was involved. Pharaoh was hardly left with any choice. He, therefore, gave up all pretense to follow truth and justice, and brazenly resorted to persecution instead.

The tremendous and instantaneous change which took place in the characters of the sorcerers is also of significance. The sorcerers had come all the way from their homes with the purpose of vindicating their ancestral faith and receiving pecuniary reward from Pharaoh for overcoming Moses. However, the moment true faith illumined their hearts, they displayed such resoluteness of will and love for the truth that they contemptuously turned down Pharaoh's offer, and demonstrated

their full readiness to endure even the worst punishments for the sake of the truth that had dawned upon them.

وَ قَالَ الۡ مَلَاُ مِ قَوۡ مِ فِ رۡ عَ وۡ نَ اَتَذَرُ مُوۡ سٰی وَ قَوۡمَہٗ لِیُفۡ سِدُوۡ ا فِی الۡاَرۡضِ وَ یَذَرَکَ وَ اٰلِہَتَکَ ؕ قَالَ سَنُقَتِّلُ اَبۡنَآءَہُمۡ وَسَتَحۡیٖ نِسَآءَہُمۡ ۚ وَ اِنَّا فَوۡ قَہُمۡ قٰہِرُوۡنَ ﴿۱۲۷﴾

(7:127) The elders of Pharaoh's people said: 'Will you leave alone Moses and his people to spread mischief in the land, and forsake you and your gods?' Pharaoh replied: 'We will kill their male children and spare their female ones. (93) For indeed we hold irresistible sway over them.'

(93) There were two periods of persecution. The first was during the reign of Rameses 11 and took place before Moses' birth, whereas the second period of persecution started after Moses' assumption to the office of prophethood. Common to both periods is the killing of the male issue of Israelites while the female was spared. It was a calculated design to rob the Israelites of their identity and to bring about their forcible assimilation. An inscription discovered during the archaeological excavations of 1896 probably belongs to this period. According to this inscription, Pharaoh Minpetah rounds off the narration of his achievements and victories in these words: 'The Israel have been exterminated, and no seed of them is left.' For further explanation see (Al-Mu'min 40: 25)

قَالَ مُوسٰى لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَعِيْنُوْا بِاللّٰهِ وَاصْبِرُوْا ۚ اِنَّ الْاَرْضَ لِلّٰهِ ۙ يُوْرِثُهَا مَنْ يَّشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهٖ ۭ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ١٢٨

(7:128) Moses said to his people: 'Seek help from Allah and be steadfast. The earth is Allah's, He bestows it on those of His servants He chooses. The end of things belongs to the God-fearing.'

قَالُوْٓا اُوْذِيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِ اَنْ تَاْتِيَنَا وَمِنْۢ بَعْدِ مَا جِئْتَنَا ۭ قَالَ عَسٰى رَبُّكُمْ اَنْ يُّهْلِكَ عَدُوَّكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفَكُمْ فِي الْاَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرَ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُوْنَ ١٢٩

(7:129) The people of Moses replied: 'We were oppressed before your coming to us and after it.' Moses said: 'Your Lord will soon destroy your enemy and make you rulers in the land. Then He will see how you act.'

وَلَقَدْ اَخَذْنَآ اٰلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِيْنَ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الثَّمَرٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُوْنَ ١٣٠

(7:130) We afflicted the people of Pharaoh with hard times and with poor harvest that they may heed.

فَاِذَا جَاۗءَتْهُمُ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوْا لَنَا هٰذِهٖ ۚ وَاِنْ تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَّطَّيَّرُوْا بِمُوْسٰى وَمَنْ مَّعَهٗ ۭ اَلَآ اِنَّمَا طٰۗىِٕرُهُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ وَلٰكِنَّ اَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُوْنَ ١٣١

(7:131) But whenever prosperity came their way, they said: 'This is our due.' And whatever hardship befell them, they attributed it to the misfortune of Moses and those who followed him. Surely, their misfortune had been decreed by Allah - but most of them do not know that.

وَ قَالُوۡا مَهۡمَا تَاۡتِنَا بِهٖ مِنۡ اٰيَةٍ لِّتَسۡحَرَنَا بِهَا ۙ فَمَا نَحۡنُ لَكَ بِمُؤۡمِنِيۡنَ ﴿۱۳۲﴾

(7:132) And they said to Moses: 'Whatever sign you might produce before us in order to enchant us, we are not going to believe you.' (94)

(94) Pharaoh's courtiers obstinately persisted in branding Moses' signs as sorcery although they knew well that sorcery had nothing in common with the miraculous signs granted to Moses. Even a fool would not be ready to believe that the country-wide famine and the consistent decrease in agricultural output could have been caused by magic. It is for this reason that the Qur'an says:

But when Our signs, which should have opened their eyes, came to them they said: 'This is clear sorcery! And they rejected those signs out of iniquity and arrogance even though they were inwardly convinced of it' (Al-Naml 27: 13-14).

فَاَرۡسَلۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمُ الطُّوۡفَانَ وَ الۡجَرَادَ وَ الۡقُمَّلَ وَ الضَّفَادِعَ وَ الدَّمَ اٰيٰتٍ مُّفَصَّلٰتٍ فَاسۡتَكۡبَرُوۡا وَ كَانُوۡا قَوۡمًا مُّجۡرِمِيۡنَ ﴿۱۳۳﴾

(7:133) Then We afflicted them with a great flood (95) and locusts, and the lice (96) , and the frogs, and the blood. All these were distinct signs and yet they remained haughty. They were a wicked people.

(95) This probably refers to the torrential rain accompanied by hailstorm. While we do not totally exclude the possibility of other kinds of storms, we are inclined to the view, that it probably signifies hailstorm since the Bible specifically mentions that. (See Exodus 9: 23-4 - Ed.)

(96) The word used in the text - qummal - denotes lice, fleas, small locusts, mosquitoes, and weevil. This rather general term has been used in the Qur'an probably to suggest that while men were afflicted with lice and fleas, weevil destroyed the barns. (Cf. Exodus 7-12. See also Tafheem al-ur'an, (Al-Zukhruf 43, n. 43.)

وَ لَمَّا وَقَعَ عَلَيۡهِ مُ الرِّجۡزُ قَالُوۡا يٰمُوۡسَى ادۡعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ بِمَا عَهِدَ عِنۡدَكَ ۚ لَئِنۡ كَشَفۡتَ عَنَّا الرِّجۡزَ لَنُؤۡمِنَنَّ لَكَ وَ لَنُرۡسِلَنَّ مَعَكَ بَنِىۡۤ اِسۡرَآءِيۡلَ ۱۳۴

(7:134) Each time a scourge struck them they, said: '0 Moses! Pray for us to your Lord on the strength of the prophethood He has bestowed upon you. Surely, if you remove this scourge from us, we will truly believe in you, and will let the Children of Israel go with you.'

فَلَمَّا كَشَفۡنَا عَنۡهُمُ الرِّجۡزَ اِلٰۤى اَجَلٍ هُمۡ بٰلِغُوۡهُ اِذَا هُمۡ يَنۡكُثُوۡنَ ۱۳۵

(7:135) But when We removed the scourge from them until a term - a term which they were bound to reach - they at once broke their promise.

فَانۡتَقَمۡنَا مِنۡهُمۡ فَاَغۡرَقۡنٰهُمۡ فِى الۡيَمِّ بِاَنَّهُمۡ كَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا وَ كَانُوۡا عَنۡهَا غٰفِلِيۡنَ ۱۳۶

(7:136) So We inflicted Our retribution on them, and caused them to drown in the sea because they gave the lie to Our signs and were heedless of them.

وَ اَوۡرَثۡنَا الۡقَوۡمَ الَّذِیۡنَ کَانُوۡا یُسۡتَضۡعَفُوۡنَ مَشَارِقَ الۡاَرۡضِ وَ مَغَارِبَہَا الَّتِیۡ بٰرَکۡنَا فِیۡہَا ؕ وَ تَمَّتۡ کَلِمَتُ رَبِّکَ الۡحُسۡنٰی عَلٰی بَنِیۡۤ اِسۡرَآءِیۡلَ ۬ۙ بِمَا صَبَرُوۡا ؕ وَ دَمَّرۡنَا مَا کَانَ یَصۡنَعُ فِرۡعَوۡنُ وَ قَوۡمُہٗ وَ مَا کَانُوۡا یَعۡرِشُوۡنَ ﴿۱۳۷﴾

(7:137) And We made those who had been persecuted inherit the eastern and western lands which We had blessed. (97) Thus your Lord's gracious promise was fulfilled to the Children of Israel, for they had endured with patience; and We destroyed all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought, and all that they had built.

(97) The Israelites were made the inheritors of Palestine. This has been interpreted by some commentators of the Qur'an to mean that the Israelites were made the rulers of Egypt as well. This view, however, is neither supported by, the Qur'an nor by any other historical and archaeological evidence. We have, therefore, serious reservations about the correctness of this opinion. (See Tafheem ul-Quran, (Al-Kahf 18, n. 57), and (Al-Shuara 26, n. 45)

وَ جٰوَزۡنَا بِبَنِیۡۤ اِسۡرَآءِیۡلَ الۡبَحۡرَ فَاَتَوۡا عَلٰی قَوۡمٍ یَّعۡکُفُوۡنَ عَلٰۤی اَصۡنَامٍ لَّہُمۡ ؕ قَالُوۡا یٰمُوۡسَی اجۡعَلۡ لَّنَاۤ اِلٰـہًا کَمَا لَہُمۡ اٰلِہَۃٌ ؕ قَالَ اِنَّکُمۡ قَوۡمٌ تَجۡہَلُوۡنَ ﴿۱۳۸﴾
اِنَّ ہٰۤؤُلَآءِ مُتَبَّرٌ مَّا ہُمۡ فِیۡہِ وَ بٰطِلٌ مَّا کَانُوۡا یَعۡمَلُوۡنَ ﴿۱۳۹﴾

(7:138) And We led the Children of Israel across the sea; and then they came upon a people who were devoted to the worship of their idols. They said: '0 Moses, make for us a god even as they have gods.' (98) Moses said: 'You are indeed an ignorant people.'

(98) The point at which the Israelites probably crossed the Red Sea lies somewhere between the present Suez and Ismailia. After that they headed towards the south of the Sinai peninsula along the coastal route. The western and northern regions of the Sinai peninsula were then included in the Egyptian empire. In the southern part of the peninsula, in the area lying between the present towns of Tur and Abu Zanimah, there were copper and turquoise mines. Since these were of immense value to the Egyptians, a number of garrisons had been set up to ensure their

security'. One such garrison was located at a place known as Mafqah, which also housed a big temple. The ruins of this temple can still be found in the south-western part of the peninsula. In its vicinity there was an ancient temple, dedicated to the moon-god of the Semites. Passing by these places the people of Israel, who had been subservient to the Egyptians for a long time and were thus considerably Egyptianized in their outlook, felt the desire to indulge in idol-worship.

The extent to which the Israelites had become degenerated as a result of their slavery may be gauged by Joshua's last address to the Israelites delivered seventy years after their exodus from Egypt:

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24: 14-15).

This shows that even though the Israelites had been taught and trained by Moses for forty Years and by Joshua for twenty-eight years, they had still been unable to purge their minds of those influences which had warped their outlook and mentality during their period of bondage under Pharaoh. These Muslims had begun to look upon idol-worship as natural. Even after their exodus, the sight of a temple would incline them to indulge in the idolatrous practices which they had observed among their former masters.

اِنَّ هٰٓؤُلَآءِ مُتَبَّرٌ مَّا هُمْ فِيْهِ وَ بٰطِلٌ مَّا كَانُوْا يَعْمَلُوْنَ ١٣٩

(7:139) The way these people follow is bound to lead to destruction; and all their works are vain.

قَالَ اَغَيْرَ اللّٰهِ اَبْغِيْكُمْ اِلٰهًا وَّ هُوَ فَضَّلَكُمْ عَلَى الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ١٤٠

(7:140) Moses said: 'Should I seek any god for you other than Allah although it is He who has exalted you above all?'

وَ اِذْ اَنْجَيْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ اٰلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُوْمُوْنَكُمْ سُوْٓءَ الْعَذَابِ يُقَتِّلُوْنَ اَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَ يَسْتَحْيُوْنَ نِسَآءَكُمْ ؕ وَ فِيْ ذٰلِكُمْ بَلَآءٌ مِّنْ رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيْمٌ ١٤١ ۧ

(7:141) And call to mind when We delivered you from Pharaoh's people who perpetrated on you a terrible torment, putting your males to death and sparing your females. Surely in it there was an awesome trial for you from your Lord.

وَ وٰعَدْنَا مُوْسٰى ثَلٰثِيْنَ لَيْلَةً وَّ اَتْمَمْنٰهَا بِعَشْرٍ فَتَمَّ مِيْقَاتُ رَبِّهٖٓ اَرْبَعِيْنَ لَيْلَةً ۚ وَ قَالَ مُوْسٰى لِاَخِيْهِ هٰرُوْنَ اخْلُفْنِيْ فِيْ قَوْمِيْ وَ اَصْلِحْ وَ لَا تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيْلَ الْمُفْسِدِيْنَ ١٤٢

(7:142) And We appointed for Moses thirty nights, to which We added ten, whereby the term of forty nights set by his Lord was fulfilled. (99) And Moses said to Aaron, his brother: 'Take my place among my people, act righteously, and do not follow the path of those who create mischief.'[100]

(99) After the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt which marks, on the one hand, the end of the constraints of slavery and on the other, the beginning of their life as an independent nation, Moses was summoned by God to Mount Sinai in order that he might receive the Law for Israel. He was initially summoned for a period of forty days so that he might single-mindedly devote himself to worshipping, fasting, meditation and reflection and thus develop the ability to receive the revelation which was to put a very heavy burden upon him.

In compliance with God's command, Moses left the Israelites at the place now known as the Wadi al-Shaykh which

lies between Nabi Salih and Mount Sinai. The place where the Israelites had camped is presently called Maydan al-Rahah. At one end of the valley is a hillock where, according to local tradition, the Prophet Salih pitched his tent after his migration from the land of Thamud. A mosque built as a monument to the Prophet Salih still adorns the landscape. Mount Harun is located at the other end of the valley where, again, according to local tradition, the Prophet Harun (Aaron) stayed after his exasperation with the Israelites because of their cow-worship. The top of the towering Mount Sinai, standing 7,359 feet high, is mostly enveloped by clouds. The cave to which Moses retired for forty days to devote himself to worship and meditation is situated at the top of the mountain, and still attracts many pilgrims. Close to the cave are a mosque and a church. Moreover, a monastery built in the Justinian period stands even today at the foot of the mountain. (See Tafheem al-Qur'an, (Al-Naml 27: nn. 9-10).

(100) Although Aaron was senior to Moses in age by three years, he was placed under the direction of the Prophet Moses and was required to assist him in connection with his mission, As explained elsewhere in the Qur'an, Aaron was not assigned independent prophethood; he was rather appointed a Prophet by God in response to Moses' prayer that he be appointed as his assistant. See (Ta Ha 20: 29-31 - Ed.)

وَ لَمَّا جَآ ءَ مُوۡسٰی لِمِیۡقَاتِنَا وَ کَلَّمَہٗ رَبُّہٗ ۙ قَالَ رَبِّ اَرِنِیۡۤ اَنۡظُرۡ اِلَیۡکَ ؕ قَالَ لَنۡ تَرٰىنِیۡ وَ لٰکِنِ انۡظُرۡ اِلَی الۡجَبَلِ فَاِنِ اسۡتَقَرَّ مَکَانَہٗ فَسَوۡفَ تَرٰىنِیۡ ۚ فَلَمَّا تَجَلّٰی رَبُّہٗ لِلۡجَبَلِ جَعَلَہٗ دَکًّا وَّ خَرَّ مُوۡسٰی صَعِقًا ۚ فَلَمَّاۤ اَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبۡحٰنَکَ تُبۡتُ اِلَیۡکَ وَ اَنَا اَوَّلُ الۡمُؤۡمِنِیۡنَ ﴿۱۴۳﴾

(7:143) And when Moses came at Our appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said: 'O my Lord! Reveal Yourself to me, that I may look upon You!' He replied: 'Never can you see Me. However, behold this mount; if it remains firm in its place, only then you will be able to see Me.' And as soon as his Lord unveiled His glory to the mount, He crushed it into fine dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon. And when he recovered, he said: 'Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance, and I am the foremost among those who believe.'

قَالَ يٰمُوسٰۤى اِنِّى اصْطَفَيْتُكَ عَلَى النَّاسِ بِرِسٰلٰتِىْ وَ بِكَلَامِىْ فَخُذْ مَاۤ اٰتَيْتُكَ وَ كُنْ
مِّنَ الشّٰكِرِيْنَ ١٤٤

(7:144) He said: 'O Moses! I have indeed preferred you to all others by virtue of the Message I have entrusted to you and by virtue of My speaking to you. Hold fast therefore, to whatever I have granted you, and give thanks.'

وَ كَتَبْنَا لَهٗ فِى الْاَلْوَاحِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ مَّوْعِظَةً وَّ تَفْصِيْلًا لِّكُلِّ شَىْءٍ فَخُذْهَا بِقُوَّةٍ وَّ اْمُرْ
قَوْمَكَ يَاْخُذُوْا بِاَحْسَنِهَا سَاُورِيْكُمْ دَارَ الْفٰسِقِيْنَ ١٤٥

(7:145) And We ordained for Moses in the Tablets all manner of admonition, and instruction concerning all things, (101) and said to him: Hold to these, with all your strength. and bid your people to follow them in accord with their best understanding. (102) I shall soon show you the habitation of the wicked. (103)

(101) The Bible categorically mentions that the tablets were of stone. The act of writing on these tablets is attributed in both the Qur'an and the Bible, to God. Nonetheless, it is not possible to ascertain whether the actual act of writing was as performed by God exercising His power directly, or by God in the sense of His assignment of the task to some angel or to Moses (cf. Exodus 31: 18, 32: 15-16; and Deuteronomy, 5: 6-22).

(102) The Israelites were asked to hold fast to the Law to follow it in its plain meaning, a meaning which can he grasped by an ordinary man of sound heart and good intent with the help of his common sense. This stipulation was added in order to discourage the chicanery and hair-splitting to which lawyers resort in order to accommodate the crooked aims of the people. The warning was necessary to emphasize that holding fast to the Law was not to be equated with following the chicanery of the lawyers.

(103) The Israelites were told that on their way they would come across the ruins of earlier nations who had refused to turn to God and who had persisted in their evil way's. Observing those ruins

would he instructive insofar as they eloquently spoke of the tragic end that meets those who indulge in such iniquity .

سَاَصۡرِفُ عَنۡ اٰيٰتِىَ الَّذِيۡنَ يَتَكَبَّرُوۡنَ فِى الۡاَرۡضِ بِغَيۡرِ الۡحَقِّ‌ؕ وَاِنۡ يَّرَوۡا كُلَّ اٰيَةٍ لَّا يُؤۡمِنُوۡا بِهَا‌ۚ وَاِنۡ يَّرَوۡا سَبِيۡلَ الرُّشۡدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوۡهُ سَبِيۡلًا‌ۚ وَاِنۡ يَّرَوۡا سَبِيۡلَ الۡغَىِّ يَتَّخِذُوۡهُ سَبِيۡلًا‌ؕ ذٰلِكَ بِاَنَّهُمۡ كَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا وَكَانُوۡا عَنۡهَا غٰفِلِيۡنَ ۝١٤٦

(7:146) I shall turn away from My signs those who, without any right, behaved haughtily in the earth, (104) even if they may, witness each and every, sign, they shall not believe therein. And even if they see the right path, they shall still not follow it; but if they see the path of error. they shall choose it for their path. This is because they rejected Our signs as false and were heedless to them.

(104) It is God's law that evil-doers do not and cannot take any lesson from the otherwise instructive events which they observe. The arrogance mentioned here refers to man's delusion that he is on a higher plane than God's creatures and servants. It is this which prompts him to disregard God's command and to adopt an attitude which suggests that he neither considers himself God's servant, nor God his Lord. Such egotism has no basis in fact; it is sheer vanity. For as long as man live on God's earth, what can justify his living as a servant of anyone other than the Lord of the universe? It is for this reason that the Qur'an declares this arrogance to be 'without any right'.

وَالَّذِيۡنَ كَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا وَلِقَآءِ الۡاٰخِرَةِ حَبِطَتۡ اَعۡمَالُهُمۡ‌ؕ هَلۡ يُجۡزَوۡنَ اِلَّا مَا كَانُوۡا يَعۡمَلُوۡنَ ۝١٤٧

(7:147) Vain are the deeds of those who reject Our signs as false and to the meeting of the Hereafter. (105) Shall they be recompensed, except according to their deeds?'

(105) That the acts of such persons are vain and fruitless is evident from the fact that the acceptance of man's acts by God is subject to two conditions. First, one's acts should conform to the Law laid down by God. Second, man should be prompted by the desire to achieve success in the Hereafter rather than merely in

this world. If these conditions are not fulfilled, a person's acts will be of no consequence. He who performs an act in defiance of God's guidance, is guilty of rebellion and is undeserving of God's reward. He who acts only to obtain worldly success, is neither entitled to nor should expect any reward from God in the Hereafter. If someone uses another person's land contrary to his wish, what else can he expect from him than punishment? The same holds true for he who deliberately uses someone's land, knowing well that he is not entitled to any produce after the restoration of that land to its owner. There is no justification for him to expect any share of the produce of that land.

وَ اتَّخَذَ قَ ومُ مُوۡ سٰی مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِهٖ مِنۡ حُلِیِّهِمۡ عِجۡلًا جَسَدًا لَّهٗ خُوَارٌ ؕ اَلَمۡ یَرَوۡا اَنَّهٗ لَا یُکَلِّمُهُمۡ وَ لَا یَهۡدِیۡهِمۡ سَبِیۡلًا ۘ اِتَّخَذُوۡهُ وَ کَانُوۡا ظٰلِمِیۡنَ ﴿۱۴۸﴾

(7:148) And in the absence of Moses [106] his people made the image of a calf from their ornaments, which lowed. Did they not observe that it could neither speak nor give them any guidance? And still they made it an object of worship. They were indeed wrong-doing. [107]

(106) Here reference is made to the forty days which Moses spent on Mount Sinai in compliance with God's command when his people remained in the plain at the foot of the mountain called Maydan al-Rahah.

(107) Their cow-worship was another manifestation of the Israelites' slavish attachment to the Egyptian traditions at the time of the Exodus. It is well-known that cow-worship was widespread in Egypt and it was during their stay there that the Israelites developed this strange infatuation. The Qur'an also refers to their inclination to cow-worship: 'Their hearts were overflowing with love for the calf because of their unbelief' (Al-Baqarah 2: 93). What is more surprising about their turn to idolatry is that it took place just three months after their escape from Egypt. During that time they had witnessed the parting of the sea, the drowning of Pharaoh, and their own deliverance from what otherwise seemed inescapable slavery, to the Egyptians. They knew well that all those events had taken place owing to the

unmistakable and direct interference of the all-powerful God. Yet they had the audacity to demand that their Prophet should make for them a false god that they might worship. Not only that, soon after Moses left them for Mount Sinai, they themselves contrived a false god. Disgusted with such conduct on the part of the Israelites, some Prophets have likened their people to a nymphomaniac who loves all save her husband and who is unfaithful to him even on their nuptial night.

وَ لَمَّا سُقِطَ فِیۡۤ اَیۡدِیۡهِمۡ وَ رَاَوۡا اَنَّهُمۡ قَدۡ ضَلُّوۡا ۙ قَالُوۡا لَئِنۡ لَّمۡ یَرۡحَمۡنَا رَبُّنَا وَ یَغۡفِرۡ لَنَا لَنَکُوۡنَنَّ مِنَ الۡخٰسِرِیۡنَ ﴿۱۴۹﴾

(7:149) And when they were afflicted with remorse and realized that they had fallen into error, they said: 'If our Lord does not have mercy on us and does not pardon us, we shall be among the losers.'

وَ لَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوۡسٰۤی اِلٰی قَوۡمِهٖ غَضۡبَانَ اَسِفًا ۙ قَالَ بِئۡسَمَا خَلَفۡتُمُوۡنِیۡ مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِیۡ ۚ اَعَجِلۡتُمۡ اَمۡرَ رَبِّکُمۡ ۚ وَ اَلۡقَی الۡاَلۡوَاحَ وَ اَخَذَ بِرَاۡسِ اَخِیۡهِ یَجُرُّهٗۤ اِلَیۡهِ ؕ قَالَ ابۡنَ اُمَّ اِنَّ الۡقَوۡمَ اسۡتَضۡعَفُوۡنِیۡ وَ کَادُوۡا یَقۡتُلُوۡنَنِیۡ ۫ فَلَا تُشۡمِتۡ بِیَ الۡاَعۡدَآءَ وَ لَا تَجۡعَلۡنِیۡ مَعَ الۡقَوۡمِ الظّٰلِمِیۡنَ ﴿۱۵۰﴾

(7:150) And when Moses returned to his people, full of wrath and sorrow, he said: 'Vile is the course you have followed in my absence. Could you not patiently wait for the decree of your Lord?' And he threw down the Tablets [of the Law] and took hold of his brother's head, dragging him to himself. Aaron said: 'My mother's son, the people overpowered me and almost killed me. So let not my enemies gloat over me, and do not number me among the wrong-doing folk.' (108)

(108) The above Qur'anic verse absolves Aaron of the charge levelled against him by the Jews. According to the Biblical version of the story of calf-worship, however, it was Aaron who had made the golden calf for the people of Israel. To quote:

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, 'Up, make up gods who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And Aaron said to them, 'Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the rings of gold which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' When Aaron saw this, he built an

altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.' And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play (Exodus 32: 1-6).

The Qur'an, however, refutes the above account at many places and points out that it was Samiri the rebel of God rather than Aaron the Prophet who committed that heinous sin. For details see (Ta Ha 20: 90 ff.)

Strange though it may appear, the Israelites maligned the characters of those very people whom they believed to be the Messengers of God. The accusations they hurled at them included such heinous sins as polytheism, sorcery, fornication, deceit and treachery. Needless to say, indulgence in any of these sins is disgraceful for even an ordinary believer and decent human being, let alone Prophets. In the light of the history of Israeli morals, however, it is quite understandable why they maligned their own Prophets. In times of religious and moral degeneration when both the clergy and laity were steeped in sin and immorality, they tried to seek justification for their misdeeds. In order to sedate their own consciences they ascribed the very sins of which they were guilty to their Prophets and then their own inability to refrain from sins on the grounds that not even the Prophets could refrain.

The same characteristic is evident in Hinduism. When the Hindus reached the lowest point in their moral degeneration, they produced a literature which presents a very perverted image of Hindu ideals. This literature portrayed their gods, hermits and monks as crass sinners. In doing so, they suggested that since such noble people could not refrain from indulging in grave sins, ordinary mortals are inevitably bound to commit them. Moreover, a person's indulgence in immoral acts should not make him remorseful for the same acts were committed earlier by their monks and hermits.

قَالَ رَبِّ ا غۡفِ لِ وَ لِاَخِ وَاَ خِ نَا فِ ىرَ حۡمَتِكَ وَ اَ نۡتَ اَ رۡ حَمُ الرّٰحِمِيۡنَ ١۵١٪

(7:151) Thereupon Moses said: 'O Lord! Grant forgiveness upon me and my brother and admit us to Your Mercy, for You are most merciful of the merciful.'

اِنَّ الَّذِيۡنَ اتَّخَذُوا الۡعِجۡلَ سَيَنَالُهُمۡ غَضَبٌ مِّنۡ رَّبِّهِمۡ وَ ذِلَّةٌ فِى الۡحَيٰوةِ الدُّنۡيَا ؕ وَ كَذٰلِكَ نَجۡزِى الۡمُفۡتَرِيۡنَ ﴿۱۵۲﴾

(7:152) In reply they were told: 'Verily those who worshipped the calf will certainly incur indignation from their Lord, and will be abased in the life of this world. Thus do We reward those who fabricate lies.

وَ الَّذِيۡنَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّاٰتِ ثُمَّ تَابُوۡا مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِهَا وَ اٰمَنُوۡۤا اِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِهَا لَغَفُوۡرٌ رَّحِيۡمٌ ﴿۱۵۳﴾

(7:153) As for those who do evil, and later repent and have faith, such shall find their Lord All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate after (they repent and believe)

وَ لَمَّا سَكَتَ عَنۡ مُّوۡسَى الۡغَضَبُ اَخَذَ الۡاَلۡوَاحَ ۖ وَفِىۡ نُسۡخَتِهَا هُدًى وَّ رَحۡمَةٌ لِّلَّذِيۡنَ هُمۡ لِرَبِّهِمۡ يَرۡهَبُوۡنَ ﴿۱۵۴﴾

(7:154) And when the anger of Moses was stilled, he took up the Tablets again, the text of which comprised guidance and mercy to those who fear their Lord.

وَاخۡتَارَ مُوۡسٰى قَوۡمَهٗ سَبۡعِيۡنَ رَجُلًا لِّمِيۡقَاتِنَا ۚ فَلَمَّاۤ اَخَذَتۡهُمُ الرَّجۡفَةُ قَالَ رَبِّ لَوۡ شِئۡتَ اَهۡلَكۡتَهُمۡ مِّنۡ قَبۡلُ وَ اِيَّاىَ ؕ اَتُهۡلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ السُّفَهَآءُ مِنَّا ۚ اِنۡ هِىَ اِلَّا فِتۡنَتُكَ ؕ تُضِلُّ بِهَا مَنۡ تَشَآءُ وَتَهۡدِىۡ مَنۡ تَشَآءُ ؕ اَنۡتَ وَلِيُّنَا فَاغۡفِرۡ لَنَا وَارۡحَمۡنَا ۫ وَ اَنۡتَ خَيۡرُ الۡغٰفِرِيۡنَ ﴿۱۵۵﴾

(7:155) And out of his people Moses singled out seventy men for Our appointment. (109) Then, when violent shaking seized them, he addressed his Lord: 'Had You willed, O my Lord, You could have destroyed them and me long ago. Will You destroy us for what the fools amongst us did? That was nothing but a trial from You whereby You mislead whom You will and guide whom

You will. (110) You alone are our guardian. Forgive us, then, and have mercy upon us. You are the best of those who forgive.

(109) Moses was summoned for the second time to Mount Sinai along with seventy chiefs of the nation in order that they might seek pardon for their calf-worship and renew their covenant with God. Reference to this event is not found in the Bible and Talmud. They simply mention that Moses was summoned to receive new tablets as replacements for the ones he had thrown down and broken. (Cf. Exodus 34.)

(110) When a people are put to the test it is an occasion of crucial importance for it helps to distinguish the righteous from the wicked. Like a winnow, it separates out of the mass the useful from the useless. Hence in his wisdom God subjects people to tests. Those who successfully pass through them, owe their success to the support and guidance they receive from God. As for those who are unsuccessful, their failure is the result of their not receiving that support and guidance. This does not detract from the fact that men neither arbitrarily receive or are denied God's support and guidance. Both extending and withholding support and guidance follow a rule which is based on wisdom and justice. The fact, however, remains that man can succeed in the test to which he is put only if God supports and guides him.

وَاكْتُبْ لَنَا فِيْ هٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَّ فِي الْاٰخِرَةِ اِنَّا هُدْنَآ اِلَيْكَ ؕ قَالَ عَذَابِيْٓ اُصِيْبُ بِهٖ مَنْ اَشَآءُ ۚ وَرَحْمَتِيْ وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ ؕ فَسَاَكْتُبُهَا لِلَّذِيْنَ يَتَّقُوْنَ وَيُؤْتُوْنَ الزَّكٰوةَ وَالَّذِيْنَ هُمْ بِاٰيٰتِنَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

(7:156) And ordain for us what is good in this world and in the World to Come for to You have we turned. 'He replied: 'I afflict whomsoever I wish with My chastisement. As for My mercy, it encompasses everything. (111) will show mercy to those who abstain from evil, pay Zakat and have faith in Our signs.'

(111) It is false to assume that the general rule underlying God's governance of His realm is that of wrath which is occasionally tempered with mercy and benevolence. On the contrary, the general rule is that of mercy and benevolence and wrath is the

exception which is aroused when man's transgression and rebellion exceed all reasonable limits.

اَلَّذِيْنَ يَتَّبِعُوْنَ الرَّسُوْلَ النَّبِيَّ الْاُمِّيَّ الَّذِيْ يَجِدُوْنَهٗ مَكْتُوْبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرٰىةِ وَ الْاِنْجِيْلِ يَاْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ وَ يَنْهٰىهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَ يُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبٰتِ وَ يُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبٰٓئِثَ وَ يَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ اِصْرَهُمْ وَ الْاَغْلٰلَ الَّتِيْ كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ؕ فَالَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا بِهٖ وَ عَزَّرُوْهُ وَ نَصَرُوْهُ وَ اتَّبَعُوا النُّوْرَ الَّذِيْٓ اُنْزِلَ مَعَهٗٓ ۙ اُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ۝۱۵۷

(7:157) [To-day this mercy is for] those who follow the ummi Prophet, [112] whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel with them.[113] He enjoins upon them what is good and forbids them what is evil. He makes the clean things lawful to them and prohibits all corrupt things,[114] and removes from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them.[115] So those who believe in him and assist him, and succor him and follow the Light which has been sent down with him, it is they who shall prosper.

(112) The preceding verse concludes God's response to Moses' prayer. This was the appropriate moment to invite the Israelites to follow the Message preached by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). The upshot of what is being said here is that people can even now attain God's mercy exactly as they could in the past. These conditions require that people should now follow the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), since refusal to follow a Prophet after his advent amounts to gross disobedience to God. Those who do not commit themselves to follow the Prophet (peace be on him) cannot attain the essence of piety, no matter how hard they try to make a pretense of it by observing the minor details of religious rituals generally associated with piety.

Likewise, the Israelites had been told that paying Zakah was essential to win God's mercy. However, payment of Zakah is meaningless unless one supports the struggle to establish the hegemony of truth which was being carried on under the leadership of the Prophet (peace be on him). For unless one spends money to exalt the word of God, the very foundation of Zakah are lacking, even if a person spends huge amounts in the way of charity. They were also reminded that they had been told in the past that God's mercy was exclusively for those who

believed in His Revelation. Now those who rejected the Revelation received by Muhammad (peace be on him) could never be considered believers in Revelation no matter how zealously they claim to believe in the Torah.

Reference to the Prophet (peace be on him) in this verse as umimi is significant as the Israelites branded all other nations as Gentiles (ummis). Steeped in racial prejudice, they did not consider members of other nations as their equals, let alone accept any person not belonging to them as a Prophet. The Qur'an also states the Jewish belief that they would not be taken to ask for whatever they might do to non-Jews. See (Ale-Imran 3: 75). Employing the same term which they themselves had used, the Qur'an tells them that their destiny was linked with the ummi Prophet. By obeying him they would become deserving of God's mercy. As for disobedience to the Prophet (peace be on him). it would continue to arouse God's wrath which had been afflicted upon them for centuries.

(113) Pointed and repeated reference to the coming of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is made in the Bible. (See Deuteronomy 18: 19; Matthew 21: 33-46; John 1: 19-25; 14: 15-17, 25-30; 15: 25-26; 16: 7-15.)

(114) The Prophet declares the pure things which they had forbidden as lawful, and the impure things which they had legitimized as unlawful.

(115) The Israelites had fettered their lives by undue restrictions which had been placed on them by the legal hair-splitting of their jurists, the pietistic exaggerations of their spiritual leaders, the introduction of superstitions and self-contrived laws and regulations by, their masses. The Prophet, by relieving them of every unnecessary burden and releasing them from every unjustified restriction, in fact liberated their shackled lives.

قُلۡ يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنِّىۡ رَسُوۡلُ اللّٰهِ اِلَيۡكُمۡ جَمِيۡعَا ۨالَّذِىۡ لَهٗ مُلۡكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالۡاَرۡضِ ۚ لَاۤ اِلٰهَ
اِلَّا هُوَ يُحۡىٖ وَيُمِيۡتُ ۖ فَاٰمِنُوۡا بِاللّٰهِ وَرَسُوۡلِهِ النَّبِىِّ الۡاُمِّىِّ الَّذِىۡ يُؤۡمِنُ بِاللّٰهِ وَكَلِمٰتِهٖ وَاتَّبِعُوۡهُ
لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَهۡتَدُوۡنَ ﴿۱۵۸﴾

(7:158) [Say, O Muhammad]: 'O men! I am Allah's Messenger to you all - of Him to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. There is no god but He. He grants life and deals death. Have faith then, in Allah and in His Messenger, the ummi Prophet who believes in Allah and His words; and follow him so that you may be guided aright.'

وَ مِن قَ ومِ مُوسَىٰٓ أُمَّةٞ يَهۡدُونَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَبِهِۦ يَعۡدِلُونَ ١٥٩

(7:159) Among the people of Moses' (116) there was a party who guided others in the way of the truth and established justice in its light. (117)

(116) This marks the resumption of the main theme of the discourse which had been interrupted by the parenthesis see (Verses 157-8)calling people to affirm the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be on him).

(117) The translators generally render the verse as the following:

Of the people of Moses there is a section who guide and do justice in the light of truth. (Translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.)

They do so because, in their view, the present verse describes the moral and intellectual state of the Israelites at the time when the Qur'an was revealed. However, the context seems to indicate that the above account refers to the state of the Israelites at the time of the Prophet Moses. Thus, the purpose of the verse is to emphasize that even in the days of their calf-worship when God rebuked them, all members of Israel were not corrupt; that a sizeable section of them was righteous.

وَ قَطَّعۡنٰهُمُ اثۡنَتَیۡ عَشۡرَةَ اَسۡبَاطًا اُمَمًا ؕ وَ اَوۡحَیۡنَاۤ اِلٰی مُوۡسٰۤی اِذِ اسۡتَسۡقٰىهُ قَوۡمُهٗۤ اَنِ
اضۡرِبۡ بِّعَصَاكَ الۡحَجَرَ ؕ فَانۡۢبَجَسَتۡ مِنۡهُ اثۡنَتَا عَشۡرَةَ عَیۡنًا ؕ قَدۡ عَلِمَ كُلُّ اُنَاسٍ مَّشۡرَبَهُمۡ ؕ وَ
ظَلَّلۡنَا عَلَیۡهِمُ الۡغَمَامَ وَ اَنۡزَلۡنَا عَلَیۡهِمُ الۡمَنَّ وَ السَّلۡوٰی ؕ كُلُوۡا مِنۡ طَیِّبٰتِ مَا رَزَقۡنٰكُمۡ ؕ وَ مَا
ظَلَمُوۡنَا وَ لٰكِنۡ كَانُوۡۤا اَنۡفُسَهُمۡ یَظۡلِمُوۡنَ ﴿۱۶۰﴾

(7:160) And We divided them into twelve tribes, forming them into communities. (118) When his people asked Moses for water We directed him: 'Smite the rock with your rod.' Then twelve springs gushed forth from the rock and every people knew their drinking-places. And We caused thick clouds to provide them shade, and We sent down upon them manna and quails, (119) saying: 'Eat of the clean things that We have provided you.' They wronged not Us, but it was themselves that they wronged.

(118) This refers to the organization of the people of Israel which has been mentioned in the Qur'an in (al-Ma'idah 5:12)and also described, at length, in the Bible in Numbers. According to these sources, in compliance with God's command the Prophet Moses first conducted the census of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. He registered their twelve tribes, ten of whom were descendants of the Prophet Jacob, and the remaining two descendants of the Prophet Joseph, as separate and distinct tribes. He appointed a chief for each tribe and assigned to him the duty to maintain moral, religious, social and military discipline within each tribe and to enforce the Law. The Levites, who were descendants of the Prophets Moses and Aaron, however, were organized as a distinct group entrusted with the task of providing religious guidance to all tribes.

(119) This organization was one of the numerous favors which God had bestowed upon the Israelites. Mention is made of three other favors bestowed upon them. First, an extraordinary arrangement for their water supply was made in the otherwise arid Sinai peninsula. Second, the sky was covered with clouds such that they were protected from the scorching heat of the sun. Third, a unique meal, consisting of manna and quails was sent down on them. Had this Divine arrangement, catering as it did for the millions of wandering Israelites' basic necessities of life, not been made, they would certainly have perished.

On visiting that land even today it is difficult to visualize how such an arrangement providing shelter, food and water for millions of people was made. The population of this peninsula stands even today at a paltry, 55,000 people. (it may be noted that this statement was made in the fifties of the present century. However, the present population of the Sinai is 200,000 - Ed.) If a five or six hundred thousand strong army, were to camp there today, it would be quite a task for those at the helm to provide the necessary supplies for the army. Little wonder, then, that many scholars who believe neither in the Scripture nor in miracles, rule out the historical accuracy of the event. For them, the people of Israel camped in an area lying south of Palestine and north of Arabia. In view of the physical and economic geography of the Sinai peninsula, they consider it totally incredible that such a large population could have stayed there for years. What has made these scholars even more skeptical about the event is the fact that the Israelites were not then in a position to procure supplies from either the Egyptians or the 'Amaliqah' who inhabited respectively the eastern and northern parts of the peninsula, since both groups were hostile to them. It is against this background that one may appreciate the immense importance of the favors God conferred on the Israelites. Likewise, it also gives one some idea of the blatant ingratitude of the people of Israel since they consistently defied and betrayed God even though they had witnessed a great many divine signs. (See Towards Understanding the Qur'an, vol. 1, (al-Baqarah 2: nn. 72-3 and 76, pp. 76-7 - Ed.)

وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمُ اسْكُنُوا هَٰذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ وَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ وَادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا نَّغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطِيئَاتِكُمْ ۚ سَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٦١﴾

(7:161) And recall (120) when it was said to them: 'Dwell in this town and eat plentifully of whatever you please, and say: "Repentance", and enter the gate prostrate. We shall forgive you your sins and shall bestow further favors on those who do good.'

(120) This alludes to their constant defiance and rebellion in face of God' favors which eventually brought about their destruction.

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

(7:162) Then the wrong-doers among them substituted another word in place of the one told them. So We sent upon them a scourge from the heaven as a punishment for their Wrong-doing. (121)

(121) For details see Towards Understanding the Qur'an, vol. 1, (Al-Baqarah 2: nn. 74-5, pp. 76-7).

وَسْئَلْهُمْ عَنِ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةَ الْبَحْرِ إِذْ يَعْدُونَ فِي السَّبْتِ إِذْ تَأْتِيهِمْ حِيتَانُهُمْ يَوْمَ سَبْتِهِمْ شُرَّعًا وَيَوْمَ لَا يَسْبِتُونَ لَا تَأْتِيهِمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَبْلُوهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿١٦٣﴾

(7:163) And ask the people of Moses concerning the town situated along the sea (122) how its people profaned the Sabbath when fish came to them breaking the water's surface on Sabbath days, (123) and would not come to them on other than Sabbath-days. Thus did We try them because of their disobedience. (124)

(122) Most scholars identify this place with Eilat, Eilath or Eloth. (Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, XV edition, 'Macropaedia', vol. 3, art. 'Elat' -Ed.) The seaport called Elat which has been built by the present state of Israel (which is close to the Jordanian seaport, Aqaba), stands on the same site. It lies at the end of that long inlet of the Red Sea situated between the eastern part of the Sinai peninsula and the

western part of Arabia. It was a major trading centre in the time of Israelite ascendancy. The Prophet Solomon took this city as the chief port for his fleet in the Red Sea.

The event referred to in the above verse is not reported in Jewish Scriptures. Nor do historical accounts shed any light on it. Nonetheless, it appears from the way it has been mentioned in the above verse and in al-Baqarah that the Jews of the early days of Islam were quite familiar with the event. (See Towards Understanding the Qur'an, vol. 1, (Al-Baqarah 2: 65 and n.83, pp. 81-2 - Ed). This view is further corroborated by the fact that even the Madinan Jews who spared no opportunity to criticize the Prophet (peace be on him) did not raise any objection against this (Qur'anic account.

(123) 'Sabbath', which means Saturday, was declared for the Israelites as the holiday of the week. God declared the Sabbath as a sign of the perpetual covenant between God and Israel. (Exodus 31: 12-16.) The Israelites were required to strictly keep the Sabbath which meant that they may not engage in any worldly activity; they may not cook, nor make their slaves or cattle serve them. Those who violated these rules were to be put to death. The Israelites, however, publicly violated these rules. In the days of the Prophet Jeremiah (between 628 and 586 B.C.), the Israelites carried their merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day itself. Jeremiah, therefore, warned them that if they persisted in their flagrant violation of the Law, Jerusalem would be set on fire. (Jeremiah 17: 21-7.) The same complaint is voiced in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (595-536 B.C.) who referred to their violation of the Sabbath rules as their major sin. (Ezekiel 20: 12-24.) In view of these Scriptural references it seems plausible that the event mentioned in the above Qur'anic verse is related to the same period.

(124) Men are tested by God in a variety of ways. When a person or group of people begin to turn away from God and incline themselves towards disobedience, God provides abundant opportunities for them to disobey. This is done in order that the full potential for disobedience, which had remained hidden

because of lack of such an opportunity, might come to the surface.

وَ اِذۡ قَالَتۡ اُمَّۃٌ مِّنۡہُمۡ لِمَ تَعِظُوۡنَ قَوۡمَۨا ۙ اللّٰہُ مُہۡلِکُہُمۡ اَوۡ مُعَذِّبُہُمۡ عَذَابًا شَدِیۡدًا ؕ قَالُوۡا مَعۡذِرَۃً اِلٰی رَبِّکُمۡ وَ لَعَلَّہُمۡ یَتَّقُوۡنَ ﴿۱۶۴﴾

(7:164) And recall when a party of them said: 'Why do you admonish a people whom Allah is about to destroy or punish severely?' They said: 'We admonish them in order to be able to offer an excuse before Your Lord, and in the hope that they will guard against disobedience.'

فَلَمَّا نَسُوۡا مَا ذُکِّرُوۡا بِہٖۤ اَنۡجَیۡنَا الَّذِیۡنَ یَنۡہَوۡنَ عَنِ السُّوۡٓءِ وَ اَخَذۡنَا الَّذِیۡنَ ظَلَمُوۡا بِعَذَابٍۭ بَئِیۡسٍۢ بِمَا کَانُوۡا یَفۡسُقُوۡنَ ﴿۱۶۵﴾

(7:165) Then, when they forgot what they had been exhorted, We delivered those who forbade evil and afflicted the wrong-doers with a grievous chastisement (125) because of their evildoing.

(125) This shows that the people in that town were of three categories. One, those who flagrantly violated God's commands. Two, those who were silent spectators to such violations and discouraged those who admonished the criminals, pleading that their efforts were fruitless. Three, those who, moved by their religious commitment, actively enjoined good and forbade evil so that the evil-doers might make amends. In so doing, they were prompted by, a sense of duty, to bring back the evil-doers to the right path, and if the latter did not respond to their call, they would at least be able to establish before their Lord that for their part they had fulfilled their duty to admonish the evil-doers. So, when the town was struck by God's punishment, only the people belonging to the last category were spared for they had displayed God-consciousness and performed the duties incumbent upon them. As for the people of the other two categories, they were reckoned as transgressors and were punished in proportion to their crimes.

Some commentators on the Qur'an are of the opinion that

whereas the Quran specifically, describes the fate of the people belonging to the first and third categories, it is silent about the treatment meted out to the people of the second category. It cannot be said, therefore, with certainty, whether they were spared or punished. It is reported that Ibn 'Abba's initially believed that God's punishment included the second category as well. It is believed that later his disciple Ikramah convinced him that only the people of the second category would be delivered in the same manner as the people of the third category.

A closer study of the Qur'anic account, however, shows that Ibn 'Abba's earlier viewpoint is sound. It is evident that the people of the town would inevitably have been grouped into two categories on the eve of God's punishment: those who were spared and those who were not. Since the Qur'an states that the people of the third category, had been spared, it may be legitimately assumed that the people belonging to both the first and the second categories were punished. This view is also corroborated by the preceding verse:

Also recall when a party of them said: 'Why do you admonish a people whom Allah is about to destroy or punish severely? They said: 'We admonish them in order to be able to offer an excuse before your Lord, and in the hope that they will guard against disobedience.' (Verse 164).

Thus it clearly emerges from the above discussion that all the people of the place where evil deeds are publicly committed stand guilty, One cannot be absolved merely on the basis that one had not committed any evil. One may be acquitted only, in the event that one made every possible effort to bring about reform and actively worked in the cause of the truth. This constitutes the divine law pertaining to collective evil as is evident from the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an says:

And guard against the mischief that will not only bring punishment to the wrong-doers among you. Know well that Allah is severe in punishment (Al-Anfal 8: 15).

Explaining the above verse the Prophet (peace be on him) remarked: 'God does not punish the generality of a people for the evil committed by a particular section of that people until they observe others committing evil and do not denounce it even though they are in a position to do so. And when they do that, God punishes all, the evil-doers and the people in general.' (Ahmad b. Hanbal. Musnad, vol. 4, p. 192 - Ed.)

Moreover. the verse in question seems to suggest that God's punishment afflicted the town concerned in two stages. The first stage is referred to as 'grievous chastisement', for in the next stage they were turned into apes. We may, therefore, hold that people belonging to both the first and the second categories were subjected to punishment. But the punishment of transforming the persistent evil-doers into apes was confined only to the people of the second category. (God knows best. If I am right that is from God. If I err, that is from me alone. God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.)

فَلَمَّا عَتَوۡا عَنۡ مَّا نُهُوۡا عَنۡهُ قُلۡنَا لَهُمۡ كُوۡنُوۡا قِرَدَةً خٰسِئِيۡنَ ﴿۱۶۶﴾

(7:166) And when they persisted in pursuing that which had been forbidden We said: 'Become despised apes.' (126)

(126) For details see Towards Understanding the Quran, vol. 1, (Al-Baqarah 2: n. 83, pp. 81-2),

وَاِذۡ تَاَذَّنَ رَبُّكَ لَيَبۡعَثَنَّ عَلَيۡهِمۡ اِلٰى يَوۡمِ الۡقِيٰمَةِ مَنۡ يَّسُوۡمُهُمۡ سُوۡٓءَ الۡعَذَابِ ؕ اِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَسَرِيۡعُ الۡعِقَابِ ۚ وَاِنَّهٗ لَغَفُوۡرٌ رَّحِيۡمٌ ﴿۱۶۷﴾

(7:167) And recall when Your Lord proclaimed (127) that 'He would continually set in authority over them, till the Day of Judgement, those who would ruthless oppress Thern.' (128) Surely, your Lord is swift in chastising; and yet He is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

(127) The Quranic expression 'ta'adhdhana' means almost the same 'he warned; he proclaimed'.

(128) Since the 8th century B.C. the Israelites were warned consistently. This is borne out by the contents of the Books of the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and their successors. Jesus too administered the same warning which is borne out by many of his orations in the New Testament, This was also later confirmed by the Qur'an. History bears out the veracity of the statement made both in the Qur'an and the earlier scriptures. For throughout history, since the time the Jews were warned, they have continually been subjected to abject persecution in one part of the world or another.

وَ قَطَّعۡنٰهُم فِی الۡاَرۡضِ اُمَمًا ۚ مِنۡهُمُ الصّٰلِحُوۡنَ وَ مِنۡهُمۡ دُوۡنَ ذٰلِکَ ۫ وَ بَلَوۡنٰهُمۡ بِالۡحَسَنٰتِ وَ السَّیِّاٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ یَرۡجِعُوۡنَ ﴿۱۶۸﴾

(7:168) And We dispersed them through the earth in communities - some were righteous, others were not -and We tested them with prosperity and adversity that they may turn back (to righteousness).

فَخَلَفَ مِنۡۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ خَلۡفٌ وَّرِثُوا الۡكِتٰبَ يَاۡخُذُوۡنَ عَرَضَ هٰذَا الۡاَدۡنٰى وَيَقُوۡلُوۡنَ سَيُغۡفَرُ لَنَا وَ
اِنۡ يَّاۡتِهِمۡ عَرَضٌ مِّثۡلُهٗ يَاۡخُذُوۡهُ ؕ اَلَمۡ يُؤۡخَذۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡ مِّيۡثَاقُ الۡكِتٰبِ اَنۡ لَّا يَقُوۡلُوۡا عَلَى اللّٰهِ اِلَّا الۡحَقَّ
وَدَرَسُوۡا مَا فِيۡهِ ؕ وَالدَّارُ الۡاٰخِرَةُ خَيۡرٌ لِّلَّذِيۡنَ يَتَّقُوۡنَ ؕ اَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُوۡنَ ﴿۱۶۹﴾

(7:169) Then others succeeded them who inherited the scriptures, and yet kept themselves occupied in acquiring the goods of this world and kept saying: 'We shall be forgiven.' And when there comes to them an opportunity for acquiring more of those goods, they seize it. (129) Was not the covenant of the Book taken from them that they would not ascribe to Allah anything but the truth? And they have read what is in the Book (130) and know that the abode of the Hereafter is better for the God-fearing. (131) Do you not understand?

(129) The Jews knowingly commit sins in the belief that being God's chosen people they will necessarily be pardoned and spared God's punishment. As a result of this misconception, they neither repent nor refrain from committing sins. How unfortunate the Jews are! They received the Scriptures which could have made them leaders of all mankind. But they were so petty-minded that they aspired to nothing higher than paltry worldly benefits. Thus even though they had the potential of becoming the upholders of justice and righteousness across the world they ended up merely as worshippers of this world.

(130) The people of Israel know well that the Torah does not unconditionally assure them salvation. They have never been promised by God or any of His Prophets that they will attain deliverance no matter what they do. Therefore they have absolutely no right to ascribe to God something which He never told them. What makes their crime even worse is that their claim to unconditional salvation constitutes a sacrilege of their covenant with God whereby they pledged never to attribute any false statement to God.

(131) The above verse has two renderings. It may be either translated as above or it may be rendered thus: 'For the righteous, only the home in the Hereafter is the best.' Going by the first rendering, the verse means that salvation is not the

exclusive privilege of a particular person or a family. It is absolutely out of the question that one will attain deliverance even if one commits sins, simply on account of being a Jew. A little reflection will help one realize that only the righteous and God-fearing will be rewarded in the Hereafter. In the light of the second rendering, only the unrighteous prefer worldly, gains to reward in the Hereafter. As for the righteous, they are conscious of the importance of the Hereafter and hence forego worldly benefits for the sake of reward in the Next World.

وَ الَّذِيۡنَ يُمَسِّكُوۡنَ بِالۡكِتٰبِ وَ اَقَامُوا الصَّلٰوةَ ؕ اِنَّا لَا نُضِيۡعُ اَجۡرَ الۡمُصۡلِحِيۡنَ ﴿۱۷۰﴾

(7:170) Those who hold fast to the Book and establish Prayer - We shall not allow the reward of such righteous men to go to waste.

وَ اِذۡ نَتَقۡنَا الۡجَبَلَ فَوۡقَهُمۡ كَاَنَّهٗ ظُلَّةٌ وَّ ظَنُّوۡۤا اَنَّهٗ وَاقِعٌۢ بِهِمۡ ۚ خُذُوۡا مَاۤ اٰتَيۡنٰكُمۡ بِقُوَّةٍ وَّ اذۡكُرُوۡا مَا فِيۡهِ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُوۡنَ ﴿۱۷۱﴾

(7:171) And recall when We shook the mountain over them as though it were a canopy, and they thought that it was going to fall over them; and We said: 'Hold firmly to that which We have given you, and remember what is in it, that you may guard against evil. (132)

(132) The allusion here is to the event which took place when Moses proclaimed God's Divine Law at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (Exodus 19: 17-18.)

This awesome atmosphere was created by God at the time when He made the people of Israel enter into a covenant with Him in order to impress upon them the gravity of the event and the supreme importance of the covenant. It should not be mistakenly assumed, however, that the people of Israel, who were reluctant

to make the covenant, were forced to enter into it. In fact they were all believers and had gone to the Mount merely to make the covenant. The extraordinary conditions which God created were such as to make the Israelites realize that making a covenant with God was not an ordinary matter. They were rather made to feel that they were entering into a covenant with none other than Almighty God and that violating it could spell their disaster.

This concludes the discourse especially addressed to the Israelites. From here on the discourse is directed to all mankind, and particularly to the people whom the Prophet (peace be on him) addressed directly.

وَ اِذۡ اَخَذَ رَبُّکَ مِنۡۢ بَنِیۡۤ اٰدَمَ مِنۡ ظُہُوۡرِہِمۡ ذُرِّیَّتَہُمۡ وَ اَشۡہَدَہُمۡ عَلٰۤی اَنۡفُسِہِمۡ ۚ اَلَسۡتُ بِرَبِّکُمۡ ؕ
قَالُوۡا بَلٰی ۚۛ شَہِدۡنَا ۚۛ اَنۡ تَقُوۡلُوۡا یَوۡمَ الۡقِیٰمَۃِ اِنَّا کُنَّا عَنۡ ہٰذَا غٰفِلِیۡنَ ۙ﴿۱۷۲﴾

(7:172) And recall (O Prophet) (133) when your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the sons of Adam, and made them witnesses against their own selves. asking them: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes, we do testify.' (134) We did so lest you claim on the Day of Resurrection: 'We were unaware of this.'

(133) The preceding discourse concluded with the note that God made the Israelites enter into a covenant with their Lord. In the following passages all men are told that a covenant with God is not the exclusive privilege of Israel. In fact all human beings are bound in a covenant with God and a Day will come when they will be made to answer how well they were able to observe that covenant.

(134) This event, according to several traditions, took place at the time of the creation of Adam. Apart from the prostration of the angels before Adam and the proclamation that man would be God's vicegerent on earth, all the future progeny of Adam were gathered, and were endowed with both existence and consciousness in order to bear witness to God's lordship. The best interpretation of this event is found in a statement by, 'Ubayy b.

Ka'b, who has probably given the substance of what he had heard from the Prophet (peace be on him):

God gathered all human beings, divided them into different groups, granted them human form and the faculty of speech, made them enter into a covenant, and then making them witnesses against themselves He asked them: 'Am I not your Lord?' They replied: 'Assuredly you are Our Lord.' Then God told them: 'I call upon the sky and the earth and your own progenitor, Adam, to be witness against you lest you should say on the Day of Judgement that you were ignorant of this. Know well that no one other than Me deserves to be worshipped and no one other than Me is your Lord. So do not ascribe any partner to Me. I shall send to you My Messengers who will remind you of this covenant which you made with Me. I shall send down to you My Books.' In reply all said: 'We witness that You are Our Lord and our Deity. We have no lord or deity other than You.' (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 5, p. 135 - Ed.)

This event has also been interpreted by some commentators in a purely allegorical sense. They are of the opinion that the purpose of the Qur'an is merely to emphasize that the acceptance of God's lordship is innate in human nature. However, this was narrated in such a way as to suggest that the event did actually take place. We do not subscribe to this allegorical interpretation of the primordial covenant of man with God. For both the Qur'an and Hadith recount it not only as an actual happening, but also affirm that the covenant would be adduced as an argument against man on the Day of Judgement. There remains, therefore, no ground whatsoever to interpret the event in terms of mere allegory.

In our own view the event did take place. God caused all human beings whom He intended to create until the Last Day to come into existence. He endowed upon them life, consciousness and the faculty of speech, and brought home to them that there is no god or lord besides Him, and that Islam alone is the right way to serve Him.

If someone considers calling all human beings together in one assembly impossible, that shows, more than anything else the woeful paucity of his imagination. For if someone accepts that God has the power to create countless human beings in succession, there is no reason to suppose that He did not have the power to create them all at some given moment prior to the creation of the universe, or that He will be unable to resurrect them all at some given moment in the future. Again, it stands to reason that at a time when God wanted to designate man as His vicegerent on earth after endowing him with reason and understanding, He took from him an oath of allegiance. All this is so reasonable that the actual occurrence of the covenant should not cause any wonder. On the contrary, one should wonder if the event did not take place.

وَ تَقُوۡلُوۡۤا اِنَّمَاۤ اَشۡرَكَ اٰبَآؤُنَا مِنۡ قَبۡلُ وَ كُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِّنۡۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ ۚ اَفَتُهۡلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ
الۡمُبۡطِلُوۡنَ ۝١٧٣

(7:173) Or say: 'Our forefathers before us who associated others with Allah in His divinity; we were merely their offspring who followed them. And would You destroy us for that which the unrighteous did?' (135)

(135) The verse describes the purpose of the primordial covenant. The purpose is to make every person responsible for his deeds so that if he rebels against God he will be held fully accountable for that rebellion. Because of the covenant, no one will be able either to plead for acquittal on grounds of ignorance, or blame his misdeeds on his ancestors. In other words, this primordial covenant has been mentioned as the reason for the inherent awareness in every single person that God is the only Lord and Deity. Thus, none can totally absolve himself of his responsibility on the plea that he was altogether ignorant, or transfer the blame for his error to the corrupt environment in which he was brought up. Now, it can be argued that even if the covenant did take place, no human being remembers its occurrence. No human being is aware that a long time ago, at the time of creation, he had affirmed, in response to God's query, that God indeed was his Lord. This being the case, it can be further argued that no charge can be legitimately brought against man on the ground of a covenant with God which he no longer remembers to have made. In response to this it can be said that had the covenant been made fully in man's conscious memory, it would be meaningless for God to put man to the test in this world. Hence, there can be no denying that the covenant is not preserved in man's conscious memory. But it has doubtlessly been preserved in man's sub-conscious mind. In this respect the primordial covenant is no different from other pieces of knowledge in man's sub-conscious mind. Whatever man has so far achieved in the way of culture and civilization can be attributed to his latent potentialities. All external factors and internal motivations simply account for helping the actualization of those potentialities.

Neither education nor training nor environmental factors can bring out anything which is not potentially found in the human mind. Likewise, external factors have no power to root out man's latent potentialities. External factors may, at the most, cause a person to deflect from the course dictated by sound human nature. However, man's sound nature is inclined to resist the pressure of external forces and exert itself in order to find an outlet. As we have said earlier, this is not peculiar to man's religious propensity alone, but is equally true of all his mental potentialities. In this regard the following points are particularly noteworthy:

(1) All man's potentialities exist in the sub-conscious mind and prove their existence when they manifest themselves in the form of human action.

(2) The external manifestation of these potentialities requires external stimuli such as instruction, upbringing. and attitudinal orientation. In other words, our actions consist of the responses of our inherent potentialities to external stimuli.

(3) Man's inner potentialities can be suppressed both by false urges within him as well as external influences by trying to pervert and distort those latent potentialities. The potentialities themselves, however, cannot he totally rooted out.

The same holds true of man's intuitive knowledge regarding his position in the universe and his relationship with his Creator. In this connection the following points should be borne in mind:

(1) That man has always had such intuitive knowledge is evident from the fact that this knowledge has surfaced throughout history in every period and in every part of the world, and which no power has so far been able to extirpate.

(2) That this intuitive knowledge conforms to objective reality, is borne out by, the fact that whenever this knowledge has influenced human life, it has had beneficial results.

(3) That in order to manifest itself in his practical life, man's intuitive knowledge has always required external stimuli. The stimuli have consisted of the advent of the Prophets (peace

be on them), the revelation of the Heavenly Books, and the striving of those who have tried to follow them and invite others to do the same. It is for this reason that the Qur'an has been designated as mudhakkir (the reminder): dhikr (remembrance); tadhkirah (admonition). and the function of the Qur'an has been characterized as tadhkir (reminding). What this suggests is that the Prophets, the Heavenly Books and those who invite people to the truth do not seek to provide human beings with something new, something which exists outside of them. Their task rather consists of bringing to the surface and rejuvenating what is latent, though dormant, in man himself.

Throughout the ages man has always positively responded to this 'Reminder'. This itself is testimony to the fact that it is embodied in a knowledge which has always been recognized by; man's soul.

Forces arising from ignorance and obscurantism, lust and bigotry, and the erroneous teachings and promptings of devils - human as well as jinn - have always attempted to suppress, conceal, and distort the fact that the truth preached by the Prophets is embedded in man's soul. These attempts gave rise to polytheism, atheism, religious misdirection and moral corruption. Despite the combined efforts of the forces of falsehood, however, this knowledge has always had an imprint on the human heart. Hence, whenever any effort was made to revive that knowledge, it has proved successful.

Doubtlessly those who are bent on denying the truth can resort to a great deal of sophistry in order to deny or at least create doubt and confusion about the existence of this knowledge. However on the Day of Resurrection the Creator will revive in man the memory of the first assembly when man made his covenant with God and accepted Him as his Only Lord. On that occasion God will provide evidence to the effect that the covenant always remained imprinted on man's soul. He will also show how from time to time man tried to suppress his inner voice which urged him to respond to the call of the covenant; how again and again his heart pressed him to affirm the truth; how his intuition

induced him to denounce the errors of belief and practice; how the truth ingrained in his soul tried to express itself and respond to those who called to it; and how on each occasion he lulled his inner self to sleep because of his lust and bigotry.

However a Day will come when man will no longer be in a position to put forth specious arguments to justify his false claims. That will be the Day when man will have no option but to confess his error. It will then be impossible for people to say that they were ignorant, or negligent. In the words of the Qur'an: '...and they will bear witness against themselves that they had disbelieved' (Al-An'am 6: 130).

وَ كَذٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ ا ٰاٰيٰتِ وَ لَعَلَّ يَمرجِعُونَو۴۷۴

(7:174) And thus do We expound the signs (136) that they may turn back (to the right path). (137)

(136) 'Signs' here refer to the imprints made by knowledge of the truth on the human heart which help towards cognition of the truth.

(137) 'To return' here signifies giving up rebellion, and reverting to obedience to God.

وَ اتۡلُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ نَبَاَ الَّذِىۡۤ اٰتَيۡنٰهُ اٰيٰتِنَا فَانۡسَلَخَ مِنۡهَا فَاَتۡبَعَهُ الشَّيۡطٰنُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الۡغٰوِيۡنَ ﴿۱۷۵﴾

(7:175) And recite to them [O Muhammad] the story of the man to whom We gave Our signs (138) and who turned away from them; then ultimately Satan caught up with him and he was led astray.

(138) The words of the text seem to indicate that the person mentioned must indeed be a specific rather than an imaginary figure mentioned for the sake of parable. It may, be borne in mind that God and His Messenger (peace be on him) usually mention evil without specific references to any individual. This is obviously in keeping with their dignity. Only examples of evil are mentioned since those examples are meant for didactic purposes, and this is done without smearing anyone's reputation.

Some commentators on the Quran, however, have applied the statement made here to some persons who lived in the time of the Prophet (peace be on him) as well as before him. Some of them mention the name of Bal'am b. Ba'ura', others that of Umayyah b. Abi al-Salt, and still others that of Sayfi b. al-Rahib. (See the comments of Qurtubi on (Verses 175 and 176 - Ed.) Nonetheless, in the absence of any authentic information about the identity of the persons under discussion, we might as well consider the description made here to fit a certain type of person.

وَلَوۡ شِئۡنَا لَرَفَعۡنٰهُ بِهَا وَلٰكِنَّهٗۤ اَخۡلَدَ اِلَى الۡاَرۡضِ وَاتَّبَعَ هَوٰىهُ‌ۚ فَمَثَلُهٗ كَمَثَلِ الۡكَلۡبِ‌ۚ اِنۡ تَحۡمِلۡ عَلَيۡهِ يَلۡهَثۡ اَوۡ تَتۡرُكۡهُ يَلۡهَثۡ‌ؕ ذٰلِكَ مَثَلُ الۡقَوۡمِ الَّذِيۡنَ كَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا‌ۚ فَاقۡصُصِ الۡقَصَصَ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَفَكَّرُوۡنَ ﴿۱۷۶﴾

(7:176) Now had We so willed We could indeed have exalted him through those signs, but he clung to earthly life and followed his carnal desires. Thus his parable is that of the dog who lolls out his tongue whether you attack him or leave him alone. (139) Such is the parable of those who reject Our signs as false. Narrate to them these parables that they may reflect.

(139) Since the statement here embodies a very significant point, it needs to be carefully examined. The person mentioned in the verse as the representative of the evil type possessed

knowledge of God's signs, and hence of the truth. This should have helped him to give up an attitude which he knew to be wrong, and to act in a manner which he knew to be right. Had he followed the truth and acted righteously God would have enabled him to rise to higher levels of humanity. He, however, overly occupied himself with the advantages, pleasures, and embellishments of the worldly life. Instead of resisting worldly temptations, he totally, succumbed to them so much so that he abandoned altogether his lofty spiritual ambitions and became indifferent to the possibilities of intellectual and moral growth. He even brazenly, violated all those limits which, according to his knowledge. should have been observed. Hence when he deliberately turned away from the truth merely because of his moral weakness, he was misled by Satan who is ever ready to beguile and mislead man. Satan continually led him from one act of depravity to another until he landed him in the company of those who are totally under Satan's control and who have lost all capacity for rational judgement.

This is followed by a statement in which God likens the person in question to a dog. A dog's protruding tongue and the unceasing flow of saliva from his mouth symbolize unquenchable greed and avarice. The reason for likening the human character described above to a dog is because of his excessive worldliness. It is known that in several languages of the world it is common to call people overly devoted to worldliness as 'dogs of the world'. For what, after all, is the characteristic of a dog? It is nothing else but greed and avarice. Just look at the dog! As he moves around, he continuously sniffs the earth. Even if a rock is hurled at him he runs at it in the hope that it might be a piece of bone or bread. Before he discovers it to be a rock, he hastens to seize it in his mouth. Even a person's indifference does not deter a dog from waiting expectantly for food - panting for breath, his tongue spread out and drooping, and a whole world from one perspective alone - that of his belly! Even if he discovers a large carcass, he would not be content with his portion of it, but would try to make it exclusively his and would not let any other dog even come close. It seems that if any urge other than appetite tickles him, it is the sexual urge. This metaphor of the dog, highlights the fate of

the worldly man who breaks loose from his faith and knowledge, who entrusts his reins to blind lust and who ends up as one wholly devoted to gratifying his own appetite.

سَآءَ مَثَلًا ۨ الۡقَوۡمُ الَّذِيۡنَ كَذَّبُوۡا بِاٰيٰتِنَا وَ اَنۡفُسَهُمۡ كَانُوۡا يَظۡلِمُوۡنَ ﴿۱۷۷﴾

(7:177) Evil is the example of the people who reject Our signs as false and perpetrate wrong against their own selves.

مَنۡ يَّهۡدِ اللّٰهُ فَهُوَ الۡمُهۡتَدِ ۚ وَ مَنۡ يُّضۡلِلۡ فَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الۡخٰسِرُوۡنَ ﴿۱۷۸﴾

(7:178) He whom Allah guides, he alone is rightly guided; and he whom Allah lets go astray - it is they who are the loser.'

وَ لَقَدۡ ذَرَاۡنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيۡرًا مِّنَ الۡجِنِّ وَ الۡاِنۡسِ ۖ لَهُمۡ قُلُوۡبٌ لَّا يَفۡقَهُوۡنَ بِهَا ۫ وَ لَهُمۡ اَعۡيُنٌ لَّا يُبۡصِرُوۡنَ بِهَا ۫ وَ لَهُمۡ اٰذَانٌ لَّا يَسۡمَعُوۡنَ بِهَا ؕ اُولٰٓئِكَ كَالۡاَنۡعَامِ بَلۡ هُمۡ اَضَلُّ ؕ اُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الۡغٰفِلُوۡنَ ﴿۱۷۹﴾

(7:179) And certainly We have created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind; (140) they have hearts with which they fail to understand; and they have eyes with which they fail to see; and they have ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle - indeed, even more astray. Such are utterly heedless.

(140) This does not mean that God has created some people for the specific purpose of fueling Hell. What it does mean is that even though God has bestowed upon men faculties of observation, hearing and reasoning, some people do not use them properly. Thus, because of their own failings, they end up in Hell.

The words employed to give expression to the idea are ones which reflect deep grief and sorrow. This can perhaps be grasped by the occasional outbursts of sorrow by human beings. If a mother is struck by the sudden death of her sons in a war, she is prone to exclaim: 'I had brought up my sons that they might serve as cannon fodder!' Her exclamatory, utterance does not mean that that was the real purpose of the upbringing. What she

intends to convey by such an utterance is a strong condemnation of those criminals because of whom all her painful efforts to bring up her sons have gone to waste.

وَ لِلّٰہِ الۡاَسۡمَآءُ الۡحُسۡنٰی فَادۡعُوۡہُ بِہَا ۪ وَ ذَرُوا الَّذِیۡنَ یُلۡحِدُوۡنَ فِیۡۤ
اَسۡمَآئِہٖ ؕ سَیُجۡزَوۡنَ مَا کَانُوۡا یَعۡمَلُوۡنَ ﴿۱۸۰﴾

(7:180) Allah has the most excellent names. (141) So call on Him by His names and shun those who distort them. They shall soon be requited for their deeds. (142)

(141) Here the present discourse is nearing its end. Before concluding, people are warned in a style which combines admonition with censure against some basic wrongs. People are here being warned particularly against denial combined with mockery which they, had adopted towards the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him).

(142) The name of a thing reflects how it is conceptualized. Hence, inappropriate concepts are reflected in inappropriate names, and vice versa. Moreover, the attitude a man adopts towards different things is also based on the concepts he entertains of those things. If a concept about a thing is erroneous, so will be man's relationship with it. On the other hand. a right concept about a thing will lead to establishing, the right relationship with it. In the same way, as this applies to relationships with worldly objects, so it applies to relationships with God. If a man is mistaken about God - be it about His person or attributes - he will choose false words for God. And the falsity of concepts about God affects man's whole ethical attitude. This is understandable since man's whole ethical attitude is directly related to man's concept of God and God's relationship with the universe and man. It is for this reason that the Qur'an asks man to shun profanity in naming God. Only the most beautiful names befit God, and hence man should invoke Him by them. Any profanity in this respect will lead to evil consequences.

The 'most excellent names' used of God express His greatness and paramountcy, holiness, purity, and the perfection

and absoluteness of all His attributes. The opposite trend has been termed ilhad in this verse. The word ilhad literally means 'to veer away from the straight direction'. The word is used, for instance, when an arrow misses the mark and strikes elsewhere. (See Raghib al-Isfahani, al-Mufradat, q.v. ilhad - Ed.) The commitment of ilhad in naming God mentioned in the verse consists of choosing names which are below His majestic dignity and which are inconsistent with the reverence due to Him; names which ascribe evil or defect to God, or reflect false notions about Him. Equally blasphemous is the act of calling some creature by a name which befits God alone, The Qur'anic exhortation in the above verse to 'shun those who distort God's names' implies that if misguided people fail to see reason, the righteous should not engross themselves in unnecessary argumentation with them. For such men will themselves suffer dire consequences.

وَمِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَآ اُمَّةٌ يَّهْدُوْنَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهٖ يَعْدِلُوْنَ ﴿١٨١﴾

(7:181) And of those whom We have created there is a party who guide men through the truth and act justly according to it.

وَالَّذِيْنَ كَذَّبُوْا بِاٰيٰتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿١٨٢﴾

(7:182) As for those who reject Our signs as false, We shall lead them, step by step, to their ruin without their even perceiving it.

وَاُمْلِيْ لَهُمْ ؕ اِنَّ كَيْدِيْ مَتِيْنٌ ﴿١٨٣﴾

(7:183) And (for this purpose) I will grant them respite. My design is incontrovertible.

اَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوْا ۗ مَا بِصَاحِبِهِمْ مِّنْ جِنَّةٍ ؕ اِنْ هُوَ اِلَّا نَذِيْرٌ مُّبِيْنٌ ﴿١٨٤﴾

(7:184) Have they not pondered that their companion [i.e. the Prophet Muhammad] is not afflicted with insanity? He is only a plain warner.

اَوَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوْا فِيْ مَلَكُوْتِ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللّٰهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۙ وَّاَنْ عَسٰۤى اَنْ يَّكُوْنَ قَدِ اقْتَرَبَ اَجَلُهُمْ ۚ فَبِاَيِّ حَدِيْثٍ بَعْدَهٗ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

(7:185) Have they not observed the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and all that Allah has created (143) and that their term of life might have drawn near (144) After this warning from the Prophet, what will it be that will make them believe?

(143) The word 'companion' here refers to the Prophet (peace be on him) who was born, brought up, grew into youth, in short, spent his whole life including his old age in their midst. Before the advent of his prophethood, Muhammad (peace be on him) was known to all the Quraysh as good natured and of sound mind. However, as he started calling people to accept the Message of God, they immediately dubbed him insane. Now it is obvious that they were not attributing insanity to him as regards his pre-

prophetic life, for they had nothing evil to say about that period of his life. The charge of insanity, therefore, was levelled against the Message he began to preach when he was designated a Prophet.

The Qur'an, therefore, asks them to give serious thought to the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him) and to see if there is anything that is inconsistent with sanity, or is meaningless and irrational. Had people reflected on the order of the universe, or carefully considered even one single creation of God, they would have been convinced of the truth of the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him). They would have realized that whatever he said to refute polytheism, or to establish God's unity or the accountability of man in the Hereafter, or about the necessity of man's surrender to God, was corroborated by the entire order of the universe and every single atom of God's creation.

(144) The unbelievers, feeble-minded as they are, fail to understand that no one knows when he will die. For death overtakes man totally unawares. This being the case, what will be the end of those who waste the time at their disposal until death overtakes them and fail to find the direction to their salvation?

مَنۡ يُّضۡلِلِ اللّٰهُ فَلَا هَادِىَ لَهٗ ؕ وَيَذَرُهُمۡ فِىۡ طُغۡيَانِهِمۡ يَعۡمَهُوۡنَ ﴿۱۸۶﴾

(7:186) For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide; and He will leave them in their transgression to stumble blindly.

يَسۡـَٔـلُوۡنَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ اَيَّانَ مُرۡسٰٮهَا ؕ قُلۡ اِنَّمَا عِلۡمُهَا عِنۡدَ رَبِّىۡ ۚ لَا يُجَلِّيۡهَا لِوَقۡتِهَاۤ اِلَّا هُوَ ؕ ثَقُلَتۡ فِى السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالۡاَرۡضِ ؕ لَا تَاۡتِيۡكُمۡ اِلَّا بَغۡتَةً ؕ يَسۡـَٔـلُوۡنَكَ كَاَنَّكَ حَفِىٌّ عَنۡهَا ؕ قُلۡ اِنَّمَا عِلۡمُهَا عِنۡدَ اللّٰهِ وَلٰـكِنَّ اَكۡثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُوۡنَ ﴿۱۸۷﴾

(7:187) They ask you concerning the Hour, when will its coming be? Say: 'The knowledge of it is with my Lord alone: none but He will disclose it at its time. That will weigh heavily on the heavens and the earth; and it shall not come to you other than all of a sudden.' They ask you - as if you are eagerly inquisitive about it - concerning it. Say to them: 'The knowledge of

it is with none except Allah. But most people are unaware of this reality.'

قُلْ لَّآ اَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِيْ نَفْعًا وَّلَا ضَرًّا اِلَّا مَا شَآءَ اللّٰهُ ۭ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ اَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ لَاسْتَكْثَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ ۚ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوْۗءُ ۭ اِنْ اَنَا اِلَّا نَذِيْرٌ وَّبَشِيْرٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُّؤْمِنُوْنَ ۝١٨٨

(7:188) Tell them [O Muhammad]: 'I have no power to benefit or harm myself except as Allah may please. And had I knowledge of the unseen, I should have amassed all kinds of good, and no evil would have ever touched me. (145) I am merely a warner and the herald of glad tidings to those who have faith.'

(145) The time of the advent of the Last Day is known to God alone Who knows the Unseen which, in fact, is not known even to the Prophet (peace be on him). Being human, he is not aware what the morrow has in store for him and his family. Had his knowledge encompassed everything - even things that lie beyond the ken of sense-perception and events that lie hidden in the future - he would have accumulated immense benefit and would have been able to avoid a great deal of loss owing to such foreknowledge. That being the case, it is sheer naivety to ask the Prophet about the actual time for the advent of the Last Day.

هُوَ الَّذِيْ خَلَقَكُمْ مِّنْ نَّفْسٍ وَّاحِدَةٍ وَّجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ اِلَيْهَا ۚ فَلَمَّا تَغَشّٰىهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيْفًا فَمَرَّتْ بِهٖ ۚ فَلَمَّآ اَثْقَلَتْ دَّعَوَا اللّٰهَ رَبَّهُمَا لَىِٕنْ اٰتَيْتَنَا صَالِحًا لَّنَكُوْنَنَّ مِنَ الشّٰكِرِيْنَ ۝١٨٩

(7:189) It is He - Allah -Who created you from a single being, and out of it He made its mate, that he may find comfort in her. And when he covers her, she bears a light burden and goes about with it. Then, when she grows heavy, they pray to their Lord: 'If You bestow upon us a healthy child, we will surely give thanks.'

فَلَمَّآ اٰتٰىهُمَا صَالِحًا جَعَلَا لَهٗ شُرَكَاۗءَ فِيْمَآ اٰتٰىهُمَا ۚ فَتَعٰلَى اللّٰهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُوْنَ ۝١٩٠

(7:190) But when He vouchsafes them a healthy child, they attribute to Him partners regarding what Allah had

bestowed upon them. Subliminally exalted is Allah above that which they associate with Him. (146)

(146) The present and succeeding (Verses 190-8) seek to refute polytheism. These verses are devoted to highlighting the implications of the postulate which even the polytheists affirmed - that it is God Who originally created the human species. They also acknowledge that every human being owes his existence to God. God also holds absolute power over the entire process leading to man's birth, right from the fertilization of the ovum in the uterus to its onward development in the form of a living being, then investing it with numerous faculties and ensuring its birth as a sound, healthy baby. No one has the power to prevent God, if He so willed, from causing a wornan to give birth to an animal or to odd creature, or to a physically or mentally handicapped baby. This fact is also equally acknowledged by monotheists and polytheists. It is for this reason that in the final stage of pregnancy, people are inclined to turn to God and pray for the birth of a sound and healthy baby.

It is, however, the very, height of man's ignorance and folly that after a sound and healthy baby has been born as a result of God's will, man makes offerings at the altars of false gods, goddesses, or saints. Occasionally the names given to the child (e.g., 'abd al-Rasul, 'abd al-'Uzza, 'abd Shams, etc.) also indicate that man feels grateful to others than God and regardsthe child as a gift either of some Prophet, some noted Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him), or some other noted personality such as his spiritual mentor rather than a gift from God.

There has been some misunderstanding with regard to the point emphasized here. This misunderstanding has been further reinforced by traditions of doubtful authenticity. The Qur'an mentions that human beings are created from a single person, and obviously here that person means Adam (peace be on him). Now this reference to one person is soon followed by reference to his spouse, and that both prayed to God for the birth of a sound and healthy baby. And when that prayer was accepted, the couple

are mentioned as having associated others with God in the granting of His favor.

The misunderstanding consists in considering this couple, who fell prey to polytheism, to be Adam and Eve. People resorted to unauthentic traditions to explain the above verse and the story which thus gained acceptance was the following. It was claimed that Eve suffered several mishaps since her offspring would die after birth. Satan seized this opportunity to mislead her into naming her baby Abd al-Harith (the slave of Satan). (See the comments of Ibn Kathir on verse 190. Cf. Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 5, p. 11 - Ed.) What is most shocking is that some of these unsubstantiated traditions have been ascribed to the Prophet (peace be on him). The fact, however, is that the above account does not have even an iota of truth. Nor is it, in any way, corroborated by the Qur'an itself. The only point brought home by the Qur'an is that it is God alone, to the total exclusion of everyone else, Who brought the first human couple into being. And again it is God alone Who causes the birth of each baby born out of the intercourse between a man and a woman. The Qur'an also points out that the of this truth is innate in human nature which is evident from the fact that in states of distress and crisis man turns prayerfully to God alone. Ironically, however, after God blesses those prayers with acceptance, a number of people associate others with God in His divinity. The fact is that the present verses do not refer to any particular man and woman. The allusion is in fact to every man and woman enmeshed in polytheism.

Here another point deserves attention. These verses condemn the Arabian polytheists on account of the fact that when God granted them sound children in response to their prayers they associated others with God in offering thanks. But what is the situation of many Muslims of today who strongly believe in the unity of God? Their situation seems even worse. It is not uncommon for them to ask others than God to grant children. They, make vows during pregnancy to others than God, and make offerings to others than God after child-birth. Yet they are satisfied that they have a full guarantee of Paradise since they are believers in the One True God whereas the Arabian

polytheists would inevitably be consigned to Hell. It is only the doctrinal errors of the pre-Islamic Arabian polytheists which may be condemned. The doctrinal errors of Muslims are beyond all criticism and censure.

اَيُشْرِكُوْنَ مَا لَا يَخْلُقُ شَيْـًٔا وَّ هُمْ يُخْلَقُوْنَ ﴿١٩١﴾

(7:191) Do they associate (with Allah in His divinity) those who can create nothing; rather, they are themselves created?

وَلَا يَسْتَطِيْعُوْنَ لَهُمْ نَصْرًا وَّ لَاۤ اَنْفُسَهُمْ يَنْصُرُوْنَ ﴿١٩٢﴾

(7:192) They have no power to help others. nor can they help themselves.

وَاِنْ تَدْعُوْهُمْ اِلَى الْهُدٰى لَا يَتَّبِعُوْكُمْ ؕ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْكُمْ اَدَعَوْتُمُوْهُمْ اَمْ اَنْتُمْ صَامِتُوْنَ ﴿١٩٣﴾

(7:193) And if you call them to true guidance, they will not follow you. It is all the same for you whether you call them to true guidance or keep silent. (147)

(147) As to the false gods set up by the polytheists, what is the extent of their power? Not only, do they not have the power to guide others, they do not even have the power to follow others or even to answer the call of their devotees.

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ تَدْعُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ عِبَادٌ اَمْثَالُكُمْ فَادْعُوْهُمْ فَلْيَسْتَجِيْبُوْا لَكُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ صٰدِقِيْنَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

(7:194) Those whom you invoke other than Allah are creatures like you. So invoke them. and see if they answer your call, if what you claim is true.

اَلَهُمْ اَرْجُلٌ يَّمْشُوْنَ بِهَاۤ اَمْ لَهُمْ اَيْدٍ يَّبْطِشُوْنَ بِهَاۤ اَمْ لَهُمْ اَعْيُنٌ يُّبْصِرُوْنَ بِهَاۤ اَمْ لَهُمْ اٰذَانٌ يَّسْمَعُوْنَ بِهَا ؕ قُلِ ادْعُوْا شُرَكَآءَكُمْ ثُمَّ كِيْدُوْنِ فَلَا تُنْظِرُوْنِ ﴿١٩٥﴾

(7:195) Have they feet on which they can walk? Have they hands with which they can grasp? Have they eyes with

which they can see? Have they ears with which they can hear? (148) Say [O Muhammad]: 'Invoke all those to whom you ascribe a share in Allah's divinity, then scheme against me and grant me no respite.

(148) Polytheistic religions seem to have three characteristics: (1) idols and images that are held as objects of worship; (2) some persons and spirits that are considered deities represented in the form of idols and images, etc.; and (3) certain beliefs which underlie their polytheistic rites. The Qur'an denounces all these. At this place, however, the attack is directed against the objects to which the polytheists directed their worship.

اِنَّ وَلِیِّیَ اللّٰهُ الَّذِیْ نَزَّلَ الْكِتٰبَ ۚ وَهُوَ یَتَوَلَّى الصّٰلِحِیْنَ ﴿۱۹۶﴾

(7:196) My guardian is Allah Who has revealed the Book, and it is He Who protects the righteous. (149)

(149) This is in response to the threats held out by the polytheists to the Prophet (peace he on him). They used to tell the Prophet (peace be on him) that if he did not give up opposing their deities and denouncing them, he would be overwhelmed by the wrath of those deities and court utter disaster.

وَالَّذِیْنَ تَدْعُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْنِهٖ لَا یَسْتَطِیْعُوْنَ نَصْرَكُمْ وَلَاۤ اَنْفُسَهُمْ یَنْصُرُوْنَ ﴿۱۹۷﴾

(7:197) And those whom you invoke other than Allah, they can neither help themselves nor you.

وَاِنْ تَدْعُوْهُمْ اِلَى الْهُدٰى لَا یَسْمَعُوْا ؕ وَتَرٰىهُمْ یَنْظُرُوْنَ اِلَیْكَ وَهُمْ لَا یُبْصِرُوْنَ ﴿۱۹۸﴾

(7:198) And if you were to call them to true guidance, they will not hear; and you observe them looking at you whereas they have no power to see.'

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَاْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَاَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجٰهِلِیْنَ ﴿۱۹۹﴾

(7:199) [O Prophet!] Show forgiveness, enjoin equity, and avoid the ignorant.

وَ اِمَّا يَ نزَغَنَّکَ مِنَ الشَّطٰنِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللّٰ اِنَّ سَمِیْعٌ عَلِیْمٌ ۲۰۰

(7:200) And if it happens that a prompting from Satan should stir you up, seek refuge with Allah. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

اِنَّ الَّذِ نَ اتَّوَا اِذَا مَسَّ مْ طٰٓئِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّ یطٰنِ تَذَکَّرُو ا فَاِذَاُ مُّبْصِرُنَو ۲۰۱

(7:201) If the God-fearing are instigated by any suggestion of Satan, they instantly become alert, whereafter they clearly perceive the right way.

وَ اِخْوٰنُ ُمْ یَمُدُّوَ مْ فِی الْغَیِّ ثُمَّ لَایُقْصِرُنَو ۲۰۲

(7:202) As for their brethren [the Satans], they draw them deeper into error and do not relax in their efforts. (150)

(150) Here some important directives are addressed to the Prophet (peace be on him) regarding how he should preach the Message of Islam and how he should guide and reform people. The object of these directives is not merely to instruct the Prophet (peace be on him), but also to instruct all those who would shoulder the same responsibility after the Prophet (peace be on him) was no longer amidst them. The major directives are as follows:

(1) The most important qualities that must be cultivated by anyone who calls others to the truth are tenderness, magnanimity, and forbearing. Such a person should also have the capacity to tolerate the lapses of his companions and to patiently endure the excesses of his opponents. He should also be able to keep his cool in the face of grave provocation and gracefully connive at the offensive behavior of others. In facing the angry words, slander, persecution and mischief of his opponents, he should exercise the utmost self-restraint. Harshness, severity, bitterness. and vindictive provocativeness on his part are bound to undermine his mission. The same point seems to have been made in a Hadith in which the Prophet (peace be on him) says

that he has been commanded by his Lord: '...to say the just word whether I am angry, or pleased; to maintain ties with nim who severs ties with me; and to give to him who denies me (my right); and to forgive him who wrongs me.' (See the comments of Qurtubi in his Tafsir on the verse - Ed.) The Prophet (peace be on him) also instructed all those whom he deputized for preaching: 'Give good news rather than arouse revulsion: make things easy rather than hard.' (Muslim, Kitab al-Ilm, Bab fi al-amr bi al-Taysir wa Tark al-Ta'sir'- Ed.) This distinguishing feature of the Prophet's personality has also been mentioned in the Qur'an.

It was thanks to Allah's mercy that you were gentle to them. Had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away, from you (Ale-Imran 3:159).

(2) The second key to the success in da'wah work is to stay away from excessive theorizing and intellectual hair-splitting. One should rather call people in clear and simple terms to those virtues which are recognized as such by the generality of mankind and appeal to common sense. The great advantage of this method is that the Message of Islam finds its way right to the hearts of people at all levels of understanding. Those who then seek to oppose the Message are soon exposed and end up antagonizing the common people. For when the common people observe on the one hand decent and righteous people being opposed for the simple reason that they are inviting people to universally-known virtues, and on the other hand observe those opponents resorting to all kinds of immoral and inhuman means, they are bound to incline to support the standard bearers of truth and righteousness. This process goes on until a point where the only opponents left are those whose self-interest is inextricably linked with the prevailing unrighteous system, or those who have been totally blinded by their bigoted adherence to ancestral tradition or by their irrational biases.

The wisdom underlying the Prophet's method accounts for his phenomenal success and for the speedy spread of Islam in and around Arabia within a short span of time. People flocked to Islam in vast numbers so much so that in some lands eighty and

ninety per cent of the population embraced Islam. In fact there are even instances of a hundred per cent of the population embracing Islam.

(3) The interest of the Islamic mission requires, on the one hand, that righteousness should be enjoined on those who have the propensity to become righteous. On the other hand, it also requires that those who are overly insistent in their adherence to falsehood, should be left alone, and that their acts of provocation be ignored. Those who seek to spread Islam should confine their efforts to persuading only those who are prepared to consider the Message of Islam in
reasonable manner. When someone becomes altogether unreasonable and quarrelsome, and resorts to indecent methods of taunting and reviling Islam, Muslims should simply refuse to become adversative. For all the time and effort devoted to reforming such people will be totally wasted.

(4) The moment the proponent of the Islamic Message feels that he is being provoked by the excesses, mischief, and uncalled-for objections and accusation, he should realize that he is being influenced by Satan. In such a situation he should immediately seek refuge with God, and restrain himself lest his impulsiveness damage his cause. The cause of Islam can be served only by those who act cool-headedly. Only those steps are appropriate which have been taken after due consideration rather than under the influence of impulse and emotion. Satan, however, is ever on the look-out for opportunities to sabotage the efforts made in the cause of Islam. He, therefore, ensures that those who are working for the Islamic cause are subjected to unjust and mischievous attacks from their opponents. The purpose underlying this is to provoke the workers for the cause of Islam to engage in the senseless and harmful task of mounting counter-attacks against their opponents.

The appeal that Satan makes to those well-meaning, religious people is often couched in religious phraseology and is backed up by religious argument. But the fact is that those counter-attacks are undertaken merely under the impulse of

man's lower self. The last two verses, therefore, make it clear that those who are God-fearing are always very sensitive to provocations under the impulse of Satan, and as soon as they become aware of such a provocation, they promote the best interests of the cause of truth rather than satisfy their vengeful feelings. As for those who are driven by egotistical impulses, they succumb to the promptings of Satan and are eventually set on an erroneous path. They fall victim to Satan, act virtually as his puppet, and subsequently their degradation knows no limit. They pay their opponents back in the same coin, tit for tat.

What has been said above also has another import. It seeks to remind the God-fearing that their ways should be perceptibly different from the ways of those who do not fear God. The God-fearing not only avoid evil, but the very idea of committing it pricks their conscience and rankles their hearts. They have an instinctive revulsion against evil, a revulsion similar to what a cleanliness-loving man feels at the sight of a big stain or a splash of filth on his clothes. This feeling causes the God-fearing to remove every stain of evil. Quite contrary are those who have no fear of God, who have no desire to stay away from evil and who are in harmony with the ways of Satan. Such people are always given to evil thoughts and wrong-doing.

وَ اِذَا لَمْ تَاْتِهِمْ بِاٰيَةٍ قَالُوْا لَوْلَا اجْتَبَيْتَهَا ؕ قُلْ اِنَّمَاۤ اَتَّبِعُ مَا يُوْحٰۤى اِلَىَّ مِنْ رَّبِّىْ ۚ هٰذَا بَصَآئِرُ مِنْ رَّبِّكُمْ وَ هُدًى وَّ رَحْمَةٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُّؤْمِنُوْنَ ﴿۲۰۳﴾

(7:203) [O Prophet!] When you do not produce before them any miracle, they say: 'Why do you not choose for yourself a miracle?' (151) Say to them: 'I follow only what is revealed to me by my Lord. This is nothing but a means of insight into the truth, and guidance and mercy from your Lord to the people who believe. (152)

(151) This question is a taunt rather than a simple query. What the utterance implies is that if the claim to prophethood is genuine, it should have been supported by some miracle. The next verse contains a fitting rejoinder to the taunt.

(152) The Prophet (peace be on him) is being made to tell his opponents in clear terms that he has no power to get whatever he wants. Being God's Messenger, he is required to follow the directives of the One Who has sent him and has granted him the Qur'an which has the light of guidance. The major characteristic of this Book is that those who seek guidance from it do indeed find the right way. The moral excellence visible in the lives of those people who accept the Qur'an is testimony to the fact that they have been blessed with God's mercy.

وَ اِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْاٰنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوْا لَهٗ وَ اَنْصِتُوْا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُوْنَ ﴿۲۰۴﴾

(7:204) So when the Qur'an is recited, listen carefully to it, and keep silent so that you may, be shown mercy.' (153)

(153) The unbelievers are asked to shed their prejudice and to abandon their deliberate indifference to the Qur'an. Whenever the Qur'an is recited to them, they stuff their fingers into their ears and make a lot of noise lest they or any others hear the Qur'an. They should better behave more maturely and make an effort to grasp the teachings of the Qur'an. It is quite likely that their study, of the Book would ultimately make them share with Muslims the blessings of the Qur'an. This is an excellent, subtle and heart-winning approach which simply cannot be over-praised.

Those who are interested in learning the art of effective preaching can benefit immensely by, pondering over this Qur'anic verse.

The main purpose of the verse has also been explained. By implication, however, the verse also enjoins people to be silent and to listen attentively to the Qur'an when it is being recited. The verse also provides the basis of the rule that when the leader (imam) is reciting verses of the Qur'an in Prayer, the followers in the congregation should (refrain from reciting and) listen to the recitation in silence. There is some disagreement among scholars on this issue. Abu Hanifah and his disciples are of the view that the followers in the congregation should remain silent, irrespective of whether the the imam is reciting the Qur'an aloud or silently in his mind. On the other hand, Malik and Ahmad b. Hanbal are of the opinion that the followers in the congregation should listen silently only when the Qur'an is being recited aloud. According to Shafi'i, the followers in the congregation should also recite the Qur'an regardless of whether the imam is reciting the Qur'an aloud or silently'. His view is based on the Hadith that Prayer without recitation of al-Fatihah is void. (See Ibn Rushd, Bidayat al-Mujtahid, vol. 1, pp. 149-50; Ibn Qudamah, al-Mughni, vol. 1, pp. 562-9 - Ed.)

وَاذْكُر رَّبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَّخِيفَةً وَّدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ وَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾

(7:205) And remember [O Prophet] your Lord in your mind, with humility and fear, and without raising your voice; remember Him in the morning and evening, and do not become of those who are negligent. (154)

(154) The command to remember the Lord signifies remembrance in Prayer as well as otherwise, be it verbally or in one's mind. Again the directive to remember God in the morning and in the evening refers to Prayer at those times as well as remembering God at all times. The purpose of so saying is to emphasis constant remembrance of God. This admonition - that man ought to remember God always - constitutes the conclusion of the discourse lest man becomes heedless of God. For every error and corruption stems from the fact that man tends to forget

that God is his Lord and that in his own part he is merely, a servant of God who is being tested in the world; that he will be made to render, after his death, a full account to his Lord of all his deeds. All those who care to follow, righteousness would, therefore, be ill-advised not to let these basic facts slip out of their minds. Hence Prayer, remembrance of God and keeping ones attention ever focused on God are frequently stressed in the Qur'an.

اِنَّ الَّذِيۡنَ عِنۡدَ رَبِّكَ لَا يَسۡتَكۡبِرُوۡنَ عَنۡ عِبَادَتِهٖ وَ يُسَبِّحُوۡنَهٗ وَلَهٗ يَسۡجُدُوۡنَ ٪۲۰۶

(7:206) [The angels] who are near to Your Lord, never turn away from His service out of arrogance; (155) they rather glorify Him (156) and prostrate themselves before Him. (157)

(155) It is Satan who behaves arrogantly and disdains to worship God, and such an attitude naturally brings about degradation and abasement. But an attitude marked by consistent surrender to God characterizes angels and leads people to spiritual elevation and proximity to God. Those interested in attaining this state should emulate the angels and refrain from following the ways of Satan.

(156) To celebrate God's praise signifies that the angels acknowledge and constantly affirm that God is beyond any flaw, free from every defect, error and weakness; that He has no partner or peer; that none is like Him.

(157) Whoever recites or hears this verse should fall in prostration so as to emulate the practice of angels. In addition. prostration also proves that one has no shred of pride, nor is one averse to the duty of being subservient to God.

In all, there are fourteen verses in the Qur'an the recitation of which requires one to prostrate. That one should prostrate on reading or hearing these verses is, in principle, an incontrovertible point. There is, however, some disagreement about it being obligatory (wajib). Abu Hanifah regards it as obligatory, while other authorities consider it to be recommended (Ibn Qudamah, Al-

Mughni, vol. 1. p. 663; Al-Jaziri, Kitab al-Fiqh 'ala al Madhahib al-arba'ah, vol. 1. p. 464 - Ed.) According to traditions, while reciting the Qur'an in large gatherings, when the Prophet (peace be on him) came upon a verse the recitation of which calls for prostration, he prostrated, and the whole gathering followed suit. The traditions mention that sometimes some people did not have room to prostrate. Such people prostrated on the backs of others. (See Bukhari, Abwab sujud al-Quran 'Bab Izdiham al-Nas Idh'a qara'a al-Imam al-Sajdah'- Ed.) It is reported in connection with the conquest of Makka that in the course of the Qur'an-recitation, as the Prophet (peace be on him) read such a verse, those standing fell into prostration while those who were mounted on horses and camels performed prostration in that very state. It is also on record that while delivering a sermon from the pulpit the Prophet (peace be on him) came down from the pulpit to offer prostration, and resumed his sermon thereafter. (Abu da'ud, Kitab al-Salah, 'Bab al-Sujud fi Sad' - Ed.)

It is generally, believed that the conditions for this kind of prostration are exactly the same as required for offering Prayer - that one should be in a state of ritual purity, that one should be facing the Ka'bah, and that the prostration should be performed as in the state of Prayer. However, the traditions we have been able to find in the relevant sections of the Hadith collection do not specifically mention these conditions. It thus appears that one may perform prostration, irrespective of whether one fulfils these conditions or not. This view is corroborated by the practice of some of the early authorities. Bukhari, for instance, reports about 'Abd Allah b. 'Urnar that he used to perform prostration even though he would have required ablution if he wanted to perform Prayer. (See Bukhari, Abwab Sujud al-Quran, 'Bab Sujud al-Muslimin ma' al-Mushrikin'- Ed.) Likewise, it has been mentioned in Fath al-Bari about 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami that if he was reciting the Qur'an while moving, and he recited a verse calling for prostration, he would simply bow his head (rather than make full prostration). And he would do that even when he was required to make ablution for Prayer, and regardless of whether he was facing the Kabah or not.

In our view, therefore, while it is preferable to follow the general opinion of the scholars on the question, it would not be blameworthy if someone deviates from that opinion. The reason for this is that the general opinion of the scholars on this question is not supported by well-established Sunnah, and there are instances of deviation from it on the part of the early authorities.